

# WEST OF THE WEST



A SKETCH OF EARLY MISSION DAYS  
IN NORTH-WESTERN CANADA



MR. WEST'S RECEPTION AT THE SHACK.

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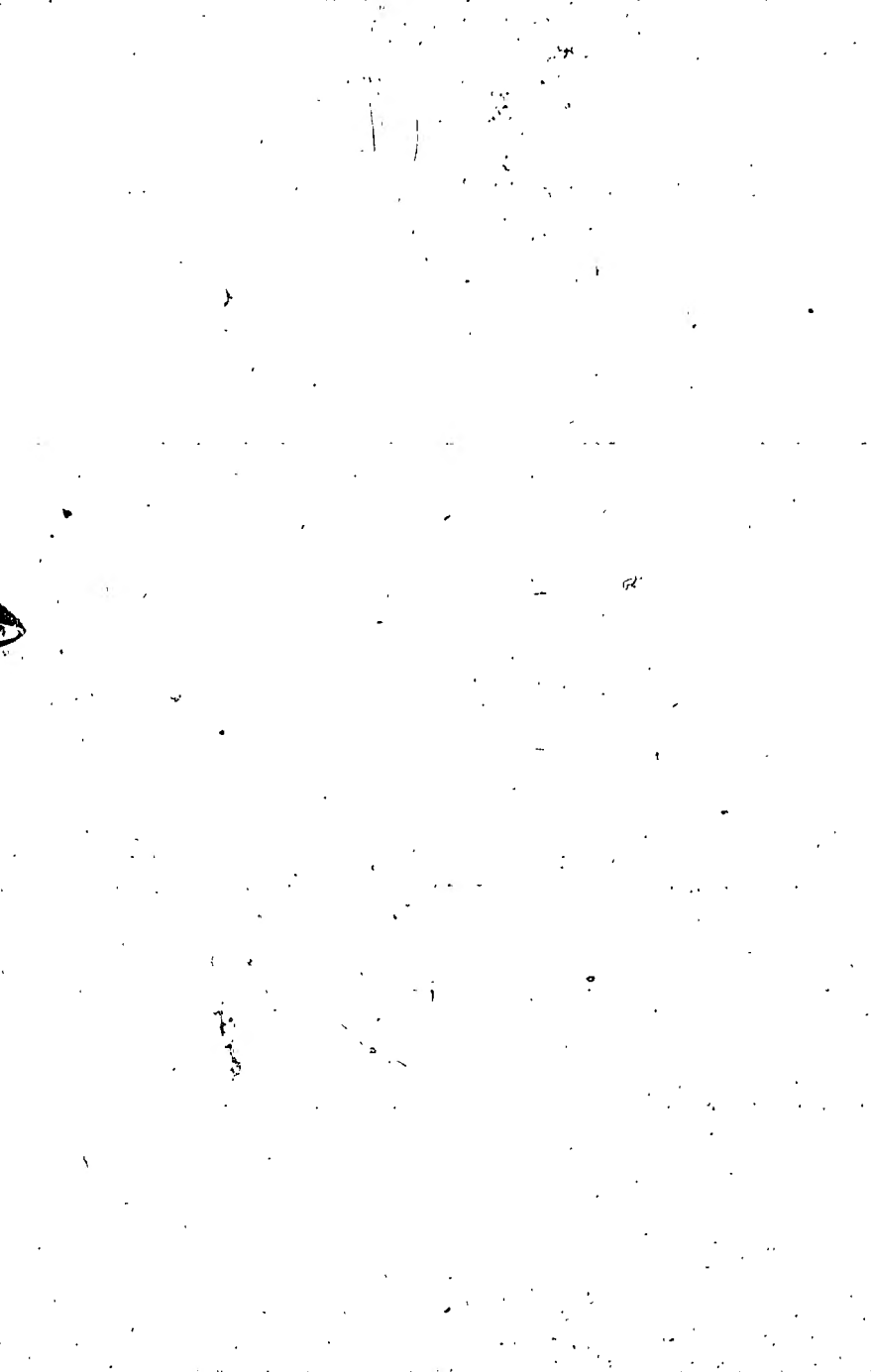
BY

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## PREFACE.

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WE write of the early eighties, called by some the "Byckboard Stage of Missions," because that was the kind of vehicle in use at the time. Missionaries were not numerous then, and out of their number we select one to gather around him a few incidents which we trust will be more or less interesting. Many will remember our *man* by another name; yet we do not wish them to conclude that everything written within is part of that honoured labourer's experience. Some of the incidents are his, some are not. Mr. West is in a sense just Mr. Western Missionary, although he is the one man held in the foreground of the narrative.



## CHAPTER I.

### MR. WEST.

O'er Indian trail, and spreading plain,  
The trusty buckboard carried him.

'TIS winter now, and Mr. West is spending Monday, the preacher's Sabbath, at home. Three services yesterday, with long drives between, have made things prosy enough, and, like Elijah at the juniper tree, he would not mind if this were the end. But the angel hand of woman, by dainty morsels and cosy home touches, soon frays away the ogres of a weary brain, and ere nightfall he is eager for another turn over the prairie.

"Janet," said he to his wife, "yesterday I saw a shack which I had not noticed before. It is away over to the south, and I'm thinking that with another sleep, and Billy (the pony) rested, I'll take a run out tomorrow and see who lives there. I can call at Mr. Chalmers'—Mrs. Duncan's, too—and then slip over to the shack to make my enquiries."

"We'll see in the morning, Norman. I am with you in all your work, but mind, if the prairie is such a sight with snow and drift as it is now, you will not leave this house with my consent. You may be sound

enough in the 'Confession of Faith' and well read in your Bible, but, whiles, I think you forget that the Lord makes the weather. Does he not tell His servants to keep inside when a blizzard is on? The very chapter you read this morning said: 'He scattereth His hoar frost like ashes, and who can stand before His cold?' Sometime you will cut off a hundred visits which might have been, by making one which need not have been. Now, dream over that, and be wise in the morning."

Mr. West did not dream as commanded, but lay awake a long time thinking of the little board shack, with a coil of smoke from the stove-pipe on the roof. "Yes," said he, at last, "I'm going, and maybe I'll not ask the weather much about it. Billy will be ready, so shall I; and now, Mr. Sleep, take charge of me till relieved."

As early dawn slowly and slyly lifted the eyelids of the sleeper, there arose in his mind the vision of a pony, a little sleigh, and a man in the sleigh so clothed with furs as to leave only a slit at the eyes to take observations of pony, trail, weather, and so forth. Also, over all, from the whiskers of the pony to the iron curl of the sleigh-runner behind, a fleecy coat of frost decked the picture in spotless white like the prairie around. With fuller awakening the dreamer grasped the meaning of the picture, and promptly arose to make the dream a reality.

The pony must have his first care, and off he goes through the frosty air to the stable. Billy hears the step, whinnies a salute, and capers a bit for the coming oats.



"Ay, ay," said his master, "the corn cribs of Egypt! When will horses forget carnal things? That means grit for a long drive, though, and you shall have your oats as long as the Lord's work fills the bin."

"You are for the road, I see," said Janet, as he returned to the house. "Well, the morning is quieter than I expected; you have been out in worse weather than this. I don't like yon yellow sky; but you and Billy know the road well. I am trying the new tea, and am sure that it will give you a fine send-off. You will not be talking to the horse much to-day, Norman, and so I'll be expecting you home in good time."

"Ay, ay, Janet; the Lord, Billy, and the tea will get me back all right, so here goes." Soon, the matured vision of the dawn could be seen skimming away in the direction of the shack.

The air was good twenty below zero, and the morning one of those when frost shimmers in the sunlight, then sits down on whatever of earth first touches its wing. On tree, on bush, indeed, on everything out of doors the feathery whiteness hung. The decking was that of a bride, but the bride was a corpse; even a little blush would have spoiled the whole.

Grace does not exactly turn winter into summer, but it sometimes raises the spirit above a large measure of bodily discomfort. The thoughts may run along the river of life, when the eye of sense sees only a white pony, a white sleigh, and a white bundle of furs. Within these furs may be wrapped a temple of the Unseen, and, deeper still, busy converse with the world's King. When faith gives place to sight, it will surely be interesting to recall those prairie talks with the Master.

Mr. West would consider such interviews too sacred for fireside chat; yet we but tell the truth when we say that they were to him the chief incentives to a life of sacrifice. The things which a Christian never tells make up the best part of his education. When faith runs away from a creed to the consciousness of a person the soul is startled by the nearness of another world. As one, dreaming alone, is awakened by a voice at his side, so does the "Man of the air" surprise his own by speaking into their very ears the words of Scripture. The personal experience of Mr. West during this drive would have been interesting to those with grace to understand it; but it remained within only as an addition to himself.

While we thus muse over what is unseen, personal, and sacred, Billy has been leaving a large portion of the road behind. Travelling has been what we call "heavy," because of the high winds of yesterday, and his master had been very still; so on the whole Billy's had been rather a prosy time; but now, with Mr Chalmers' house in sight, a new spring comes into his step, for he knows that other people keep oats as well as his master.

Well, here at last is the door. The muffled bells and the crisping sleigh-runners bring Mr. Chalmers out at once; and with the opening of the door a spout of steam, as of a Scotch mist let go. The coating of hoar frost over man, beast, and conveyance has left scarcely a recognizable mark on the whole arrival, and Mr. Chalmers has to hear from within the furs before he can fully take in the situation.

"Good morning, Mr. Chalmers!" rings out on the

clear, frosty air. It is Mr. West's voice for the first time in three hours.

"Oh, it is you! How are you, Mr. West? Glad to see you; come right in. You look as if the upper folk had been trying the white robe on you before the time."

"You will change your mind, Mr. Chalmers, when you see the grizzly bear that is inside"—and then the two friends shook hands so heartily that the chill of an eighteen-mile drive speedily removed itself outside the missionary's body.

"Go right in, Mr. West; I'll attend to the pony. Go right in; the wife and weans are not afraid of bears!"

With the help of Mrs. Chalmers and children the bundle of frost and furs soon relieved itself of the man; tall, straight, and full of endurance. In the eye rests a fire as of the "Charge of the Light Brigade"; only it is softened to a steady glow here, and the face, although pinched with cold, sheds forth the grace and liberty of another home. He wist not that his face shone, but, fresh from the "secret place," the lingering halo of the wooing told of the company he had been in. A little rubbing of the hands over the fire, a little stroking of the face, a little tucking of the coat more firmly round the shoulders, a little setting up of the bushy hair; then a playful notice of the children, and one would think that Mr. Chalmers' home was Mr. West's home,—he a brother to the father, and a father to all.

It is a meeting of brethren, for Mr. and Mrs. Chalmers are tried pilgrims. They had lost their first-

born, and their faith had stood the test. The stroke had mellowed them, and through it they found the secret of living moment by moment on the Eternal Arm. This is a home in which there need be no awkwardness in introducing the subject of religion; the awkwardness would come in not doing so. Even the children listen with pleasure.

"Mr. Chalmers, do you know what I was thinking on the way out? I was thinking . . . I was . . . well, I am not going to tell you all that I was thinking"—and he checked himself with a slight flush of the face, as if he were on the verge of betraying a secret. He felt as if the door of a private chamber had blown open, and he must needs shut it quickly. "I was thinking of faith as the 'substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen,' and it strikes me that there is more of heaven on earth than we make use of. If it is true that Christ is with us alway, we should converse with him more than we do. The rent veil lets Heaven down upon us, and if our faith had quality enough we might live in this world as not of it. The flesh-pots of Egypt should be servants, not masters. When the Word speaks with power it does so more as a person than a book. It is the living Word that makes the written Word effectual."

"Yes, Mr. West, I believe that you are right. That is faith brought down to its very root. Only a person has life and can give life."

Here Mrs. Chalmers came in from a side apartment and announced dinner.

"I have," said she, "prepared a bite a little earlier than usual; for you, Mr. West, have a long drive

before you yet. I suppose you intend to be home to-night?"

"Yes, yes," said he, rising; "you are always mindful of the missionary. Your husband and I were talking of angels' food, and here it is. Certainly, my good woman; I will be glad of a bite before I take the road again, and will not soon forget your kindness to a fellow pilgrim."

Seated at the table, they began to talk of things nearer hand.

"I saw," said Mr. West, "a little board shack over in the direction of Mrs. Duncan's; can you tell me who lives there?"

"Oh, that is where the two bachelors live; they are from the East, and have been out only three or four months."

"Three or four months, Mr. Chalmers? I did not notice the shack till last Sabbath. Do they attend services at the schoolhouse?"

"Not they, Mr. West; they are not of that sort. They never go inside a church door, or to any place where a service is held. Indeed, they scoff at the Bible and all things religious. They have taken in some light infidel notions, and are quite defiant and outspoken against all sacred things. If you had the thought of going to see them, my advice is—just leave them alone. They would like nothing better than to mock at both messenger and message."

"Well," said Mr. West, "I had the intention of going, and still have. I am sorry to hear such things; but that only inclines me the more to visit them. I rather like to meet people of that kind. It does me

good"—and for a moment could be seen the gleam of battle in his eye.

"Now, Billy, at it again, lad," said he, as Mr. Chalmers had finished tucking the robes about his feet. "Good-bye, friend Chalmers — good-bye! 'God be with you till we meet again.'" Then, once more the picture of the morning sped along the road, growing whiter and whiter as the frost resumed its contract of making all things of one colour.

Mr. West was not one of those who plan their work beforehand, and then carry out the programme. He remembered the words: "It shall be given you in that hour what ye shall say," and he relied on that promise. "Lo, I am with you alway" had become the one great fact of his life, and his constant response was: "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"

Preparation for the pulpit is more or less a well-defined task; but personal dealing cannot be pre-arranged. Self is, then, better out of the way, so that the Divine tact of the Divine Man may have free scope. In going to this shack, Mr. West did not say: "I'll do this or I'll do that." No, not at all; he simply said to all such suggestions: "Keep out of the way; the Lord has brought me so far, and I am not going to spoil the end by my own planning."

"Ho, ho!" called Mr. West at the door of Mrs. Duncan's house, and speedily she appeared. "How are you, Mrs. Duncan? Sorry I cannot go inside to-day. I must move on, and be back to my own home to-night. I'll leave the promise and pay the visit some other time. Glad you are all well. Hope to see you at service next Sabbath. Too cold to be standing there. Good-bye just now."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE SHACK.

ABOUT one o'clock he drew rein at the door of the shack—one of those little apologies for a house, banked half-way up to the roof with snow, one window and one door in front, and the back turned to the north-west wind.

He did not need to announce his arrival, for dogs within had caught the sound of bells, and were loudly demanding to be let outside. Life was there sure enough; more than that of dogs, too, for the missionary could see a little patch of frost being scratched away from the window-pane, then an eye; and then he heard someone kicking his way through the dogs to the door. The latch lifted, and the door drawn, the man came as a tumbling heap over the step, rolling on the snow to the side of the sleigh. The dogs, in their eager haste to be out, had given their master a most ungraceful introduction to the visitor.

"Confound the dogs," he hissed, hurling at them part of a small pile of stove-wood which lay by the side of the door. "Good day, sir," said he, turning to the sleigh. "Sharp wea—— Oh, confound the dogs!" he howled, and sent more firewood after them.

"Good day," put in Mr. West, by way of helping him out. "Your dogs seem to be quite interested in my visit. I have not had so *loud* a reception for many a day."

"There will not be so many later on," remarked the man, as from the ground-swell of his passion. "It's you, you old, slop-jawed hound; you have spoiled all the younger ones!" This, with the balance of his wrath, he fired at an elderly looking specimen that had ceased barking, and was looking up in his master's face as if hit on a more vital part than the ribs. "Yes, you will get your last lesson soon, mind that." Then the old dog slunk away, and the others ceased their noise.

"Old dogs, like old men, are hard to mend," said Mr. West. "There is always something of their own or of their training which asserts itself."

"Oh, you are the preacher, are you?" said the other, catching at the tone of the last remark. "No wonder my dogs had so much to say. This is quite new to them, I assure you—and their master, too, for that matter."

"Your guess as to my occupation was not far astray, sir. I hold service fortnightly over at the schoolhouse, to the south a few miles. Last Sabbath I noticed your house, and took it upon me to come over and see who lived here."

"Very good of you, sir. My name is Long, and I have a partner called Ross. We have taken land, and hope to make things go by and by. Winter doesn't count for much in this country, you know, so we are just lying in, like the badgers, till the spring arrives."

"You must lie in pretty well, Mr. Long. I have not seen you at any of our meetings."



"No sir," said he, "and I might as well make long short by telling you that we have no use for the old tales which you find in the Bible."

"That is one way of making Long *short*," remarked Mr. West, with a faint twinkle in his eye. "But, you see, this is something which will not stay short. It always sprouts again, and refuses to be dismissed by a wave of the hand. How will it suit if we go in to the fire and discuss the subject — say, ten or fifteen minutes? You have plenty of wood lying around, I see."

"Certainly, sir. I'll blanket the pony and tie him to this post. Come in and be warmed, by all means. All I have to say is this: we have no particular need of your preaching."

With the movement of the two men to the door, the dogs became just as anxious to be in as they had been to be out; but Long took good care that they should be left behind. After admitting the missionary, he swung himself in and slammed the door quickly, yet just quickly enough to catch the foremost head behind the ears.

"Ha, ha," he sang out, with evident satisfaction; "the door has you where the rope will some day," and he vigorously kicked the head out to the dog to whom it belonged. Then with a chuckle of triumph he remarked: "They will have plenty of room to mend their manners out there, and plenty of time, too, as far as I am concerned."

Turning to Mr. West, he continued: "I was not expecting a visit from the cloth to-day; but the shack, as you see, is in first-floor order — everything just where I can lay my hands on it."

"Or your feet either," came out from behind a curtain in a corner of the room.

"Come out, Jim," shouted Long, "and bring your head with you. It will need combing anyway, and maybe you will get the job done in a way you don't expect."

With this Jim appeared on the scene—quite a fine-looking young man; a little mark of the batch, of course, but withal a birthright of intellect that could sweep over a much broader part of the earth than that within the four walls of a bachelor's shack. At first sight he had a dreamy look in his eyes; yet not the drowsiness of sleep. No, not at all; it was rather the haziness over a mind that had been very far away, and had not quite returned. A book in hand, with a finger between the leaves, told the story that it had had him off to scenes other than his present surroundings. The cobwebs of romance were, however, soon brushed aside, and the real wide-awake Mr. Ross stood before the missionary.

"This is Mr. Ross," said Long. "My partner, you know, when there isn't any book on hand; and my chief cook when he can't help it."

"You are a dandy," retorted Ross. "He speaks through his hat quite a bit, Mr. West; and I can assure you it is no small relief to get hold of a book betimes, or to have even a preacher call. Be seated, sir, and make yourself at home."

"Thank you; this fire is quite in line with my needs at present. You are fond of books, it seems?"

"Oh, yes; I have taken to reading of late; and I often think that I have missed much by not begin-

ning sooner. It does seem as if it is only when the body comes to its set, that the mind really asserts itself. I think the soul of man—if there is such a thing—lives in his stomach for the first twenty years of his life. Indeed, in some instances (a side glance at Long), it never seems to get out of that apartment."

"Whoop!" sang out Long, who was filling his pipe over at a side table. "Clever boy. Good shot! My stomach, eh? But don't think that he lives on wind or books either; he can go a piece of stew with the next man, when somebody else catches the rabbit and cooks it for him."

"You seem to understand each other pretty well," said Mr. West. "I am glad, too, that you are taking to books, Mr. Ross; man cannot live by bread alone, you know," and his eye fell on the book which Mr. Ross still held in his hand.

"After that look, parson," said Ross, "you need not finish the sentence about the bread. You are thinking that Bibles are not done up in paper covers; but, let me tell you, this book is more on your side than mine. It has had me away to the year two thousand, when churches will be only curiosities referring to the age in which we now live—no priestism then, no preaching isms, no missionaries floundering in the snow. My fault with the book is that it does not abolish religion altogether. Don't think me disrespectful, but I see that when a man begins with superstition, age but works it the deeper into him. The idea of shovelling physic into a man when he is young, because he may need it when he is old, won't work as it once did. I believe in getting free now,

and then I'll be free all the way through. 'As the twig is bent, so is the tree inclined.'"

"Very good, my young man; but don't think that I would interfere with your liberty. I like independence; and would not have you take your creed from any man—not even from one with some grey hairs like myself. When I said: 'Man shall not live by bread alone,' you had the remainder of the sentence in your mind, and I am glad that you read your Bible. If that book in your hand were the Word of God, it would certainly make you free; but if it is the word of Bellamy, or any other man, I would not give much for the liberty which it brings you. You have been very outspoken with me—and you have a right to, for it is your own house—now permit me to be just as plain with you. Any liberty which you may suppose you have, apart from the Word of God, is a delusion and a snare. Because the Bible is from the 'Father of Lights,' it should be taken as the test of truth in all other books."

Young Ross had no doubt made a genuine effort to establish himself in unbelief. He really wanted to capture the liberty which he supposed lay behind the denial of a God. His success, however, was only to the extent of hoisting a flag which very poorly indexed the state of things within. Glibness of tongue but showed his weakness of creed; and soon the bold front retreated before the equally bold front and something else which faced him in the person of Mr. West. The settled faith of the missionary was too much for the mushroom growth of the young sceptic. Something, or some *One*, seemed to get in where he had been

building, and made sad work with the untempered walls. The grave where he had been trying to bury his loyalty to heaven suddenly opened, and all that was best in him came forth to proclaim itself still alive. His heart also spake out, denying the statements of the tongue, thus forcing unbelief to put on the white feather of silence.

It was the kindly but searching light of the missionary's eye, and the subtle force of his character that did the work. Mr. Ross could not have told how it came about, but certainly he felt like a teepee with its canvas loose about the poles; and there Mr. West yearned over him as over a son whose heart was soft.

"Would you mind if I were to read a chapter and pray before we part?" asked the missionary. The words were addressed to Ross, but Long gave the answer. He was never troubled with silence; so he sang out from another corner of the room: "Go right on, parson. You've been combing Jim's head from the inside, I see, and you might as well finish the job. Go right on; read, and the other thing, too, if you like."

"Well, I like," said Mr. West, promptly; and with this he drew from an inside pocket a small Bible, and began to read from the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew.

Ross listened as if he were hearing something new. There was a Presence in the room other than those of the three men, and the words seemed to come from the Unseen One. Silent attention was to him the one thing possible, but with Long, not so; he could go where "angels fear to tread." There was too much

Holy Ghost in the shack for him, and he put on a ready-to-speak air, twitching and moving in his seat to break the spell.

Mr. West read on of the talents, the sheep, and the goats, and then came to the outer darkness. This was the jumping-off place for Long; he could endure it no longer, so he let go in this fashion:

"Well, I declare; that is the old fire and brimstone story again. Do you think that anybody believes that nowadays? There is no such place, and I can prove it from the Bible itself in a dozen of places." Then he went to a trunk to get his own Bible, and Mr. West read the remainder of the chapter to Ross.

After some rummaging, he returned fingering over the leaves to find passages for his purpose.

"Well," said Mr. West, "we are ready for your proof-texts. When there are so many, some of them should not be far to seek. Come away, we are waiting for you. No, you can't find *one*, and never will. Look here, young man (and with this he fixed his 'Balaclava' eye full on the face of Long), have you been through the universe of God, and discovered that there is no hell? Your mother put that Bible in your trunk when you left home, isn't that true? and now the first time you bring it out is to quibble about its plain teaching. Is that fair to your mother and your God? Now, see here, I have a message for you to-day, and you will not forget it—no, you will not forget it as long as you live: There is a hell, and you are on the way to it! Flee to the sinner's refuge at once. Let us pray."

When the missionary's knees went down by the

side of the chair, he glanced round to see if the young men were kneeling with him. They were not; they were only looking questions at each other, and seeming to feel that things were taking a very awkward turn; so he helped them out by saying: "Come now, down with you; no beg pardons of the devil when you bow to God; down you go"—and they did. Then, when the prayer went up, the blessing came down; and the missionary, once more, felt that bread had been cast upon the waters to return again.

The words at parting were very friendly and respectful. Billy was eager to be off, and so was his master, for it was now two o'clock. The tucking-in of the robes, the hand-shaking and the good-byes over, Mr. West was soon on the road again, and the young men back to the shack to meditate on this little break in their solitary life.

"Well," said Long, rubbing his hands at the fire, "I don't know how you feel, Jim, but something tells me that I have been dreaming for the past half-hour or more. We were on our knees all right, though. Miracles never cease! He combed you down in good style, I noticed."

"You did, eh? Of course you didn't see your own top-knot fall, but it did. No shot goose ever answered the crack of a gun with greater haste. He combed us both, sure enough; but what of it? We needed it, most likely; and there is some satisfaction in knowing that a gentleman did it. Indeed, I would not object to another of the same ere long."

"Now you are talking sense, Jim. That was a treat, sure enough. Why, rabbit stew can't touch it.

He means business, that man, sure; and, after all, our toadstool notions may not figure out right when the reckoning comes."



### CHAPTER III.

#### OUT IN A BLIZZARD.

FROM the dimly-lighted shack to the almost boundless prairie is no small change. It is like the sudden passing from a cage into a new, open world; and with the spaciousness come larger and more generous thoughts. This Mr. West felt, and he began to wonder at the sharp, brusque debate which had taken place in that bachelor dwelling. He wondered if he had been lured into an exhibition of self beyond what his Master would approve; and yet he felt that certain persons needed firm dealing. Humility may work along with some degree of sternness when there is in the agent conscious surrender to the One who knows all things. The end justified the means; and he hoped to hear from the young men some other day.

Travelling was now his care, and he began to talk to the pony about the prospect of getting home before dark. "You mean to do it, Billy; I see by the prick of your ears. You had a good feed of oats at Mr. Chalmer's, I know; and you will not be needing much of what I hold in my hand. Your mistress said in the morning: 'I don't like yon yellow sky.' She thought that it meant wind; and by the way that the snow is

taking to its merriourms, the guess may be right. I was thinking of the Perseverance of the Saints; but we may take a turn at that some other day. Keep up your step, lad; you are doing well."

A long stretch of the road was now travelled in silence, and yet many miles lay between the missionary and his home. Night was coming, too, but this would have mattered little had not the storm increased during all the afternoon. The snow which, at the beginning, had played itself into little whirlwinds, was now raging in the air—a blizzard was on. Eyes were of little use, and the missionary was driven to faith in his pony. But what could Billy do? His eyes were sealed too, and he could only pick out the trail with his feet. When one foot went down, he knew that the road lay to the side of the solid foot. Of course, those difficulties reduced the pace to a slow walk, and Mr. West began to wish that his home were not four miles away.

"You will have plenty of fresh air in your stable to-night, lad," said he, as he passed the leeward side of a bluff, where his words could be heard. But the plucky pony, finding the road good in this sheltered spot, struck up a trot, as much as to say: "You'll see me reach my own stable yet." Not much farther on, however, he lost the track, and although his master tried to set him right, all nature seemed out of joint. What he thought was surely right, was surely wrong; and he could only conclude that they were out for the night, lost on the open plain.

"The lost cannot seek," said he, with something of resignation; "they must be found." Then, with sub-

mission, a well-known sweetness crept into his soul, along with those words of Scripture: "A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest." The decree had gone forth, and he, by faith, entered into the "secret place of the Most High." His refuge was secure, and no storm could disturb the peace within.

A mind made up is the work half done. It is even as good as done, when the One who sees the end from the beginning says it is to be. Out of the Eternal Calm had come those words: "A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind," and the missionary just took them to mean, present salvation. So, faith set him down at his own fireside, although storm and darkness surrounded him. Assured of deliverance, he set to with right good will to make the promise a part of the world's history, and his own in particular.

The baffled pony seemed thoroughly ashamed of himself. He had never before lost his way, nor failed to take his master home. There he stood like a donkey in the dumps, resolved to give no countenance to the storm. Had a bluff been near he might have been enticed to that; but for him no such refuge was nigh. Only a lone poplar tree stood there—low, scraggy, and torn, like a stray sheep escaped from the wolves with bare life. The desolation was complete, all but the light of hope in the missionary's soul. And who will deny value to that which can take the sting out of a north-west blizzard?

"Poor Billy," said the missionary, as he stood beside the pony's head stroking his nose. "This is not your fault, my lad. Keep up heart; I have something

for you in the sleigh, and the Lord will show us the way in the morning."

For many hours Billy had heard nothing but the swish of the driven snow, and those cheering words, spoken so close to his ear, turned him from the donkey to the horse again, and with a sigh of resignation he was ready to fall in with any arrangement which his master would decide upon for the night. This he showed by scooping up a mouthful of snow as a prelude to the feast of promised oats.

In a few minutes he was tied with a strong rope to the little scraggy tree, relieved of his harness, wiped down with a wisp of hay from the sleigh, and a thick blanket strapped around his body. Then the oats were brought and poured into a little trough, made by scraping away the snow with the side of the foot till the ground was reached—thus Billy's stabling was made complete for the night.

Next in order was the preparation for the missionary's own lodging. "Let me see," said he; "what have I to work with? Well, there is a sleigh, some prairie grass, a rug, a robe, and what is on my back." Quickly he duffed the snow off a patch of ground, drew the sleigh along the windward side, raised it on its edge, and turned the shafts at right angles, bracing against the storm. Then he laid the hay on the ground, the rug on the hay, himself on the rug; and so, covered with the robe, the seat cushion for a pillow, he lowered the sleigh over all, and committed himself to the One who had promised to care for him.

Grace does not exempt from trials, but it gives strength to overcome. To lie down in such a lair and

be sung to sleep by a north-west blizzard was new to Mr. West, and it helped him to understand as never before the value of a home. Had his thoughts been wholly on his surroundings, there would have been little wanting in his cup of discomfort ; but he refused to think of aught else but the promise. It was not the wind that hushed him to sleep, but, rather, the presence of Him who said, " Be still," to the storm of Galilee. The still small voice of an appropriated promise has in it all the sweetness of both father and mother. " A man shall be a covert from the tempest."

We lie down, perchance to dream ; and that night brought many strange visitors to the missionary's brain. As sleep ran through his tabernacle, tucking down the blinds and closing every avenue to the outer world, these seemed not to fit as usual ; little buzzing imps found their way through, and kept up a skirmish within. And yet he slept, for something else held the mastery over all comers, and, as in the case of Abraham, kept the birds off the sacrifice. So, for a time he slept, but as the night wore on, he began to dream of being buried alive. He felt as if a heavy weight were being rolled on his feet, and on toward his body. 'Twas but a dream, and yet, in a way, he entered a stern protest against such treatment. Beneath those slumbering eyelids the Balaclava fire kindled for the fray. " He was not going to be buried before he was dead ; no, not he. He would fight for it ; yes, and that with all his might." With this he awoke, and knew that the enemy in his dream was but a dull numbness creeping over him, beginning at his feet.

The sensation was not wholly unpleasant; and there, with the wind howling its best, he found himself halting between two opinions—one to submit to the drowsiness, the other to rise and shake it off. Then he remembered what someone had said: "Those who perish from cold, sleep away without waking, and never know that it is the end." With this he made an extra effort, raised the little sleigh to its edge again, and forced himself out into the storm. On trying to walk, however, he found that his legs would not obey his will as they had done before. He felt as if the old ones had been taken away while he slept, and wooden ones put in their place. Soon, however, stinging pains shot through those members, which proved very forcibly that they were still flesh and blood. This also told of returning circulation; and it began to dawn on him that the Lord had, thus far, kept His promise by waking him just in time.

With some difficulty he reached the pony, and found him getting in the time very well. Billy knew the prairie much better than his master, and this night, although the absence of a sheltering bluff was rather serious, only reminded him of the time when he pined for a living all the winter long.

Back to his shelter again, Mr. West's pains soon gave place to heat, and with ease he closed his eyes till the morning. Yet that midnight experience was not soon to be forgotten. It was a little black paragraph, which would not easily fit in to the ordinary chapters of his life—a peculiar little epistle by itself, filled with the tracery of a dream, and yet with too many weird things dancing to the howl of cayote and tem-

pest to be really a dream. As one would turn in his grave to ask if the resurrection had come, so he, finding it still dark, lay down again to await the morning. It was a dark stroke across his pathway from which to count the days of the future—days, too, which would be all the brighter because of having companied with the risen Christ in the time of human extremity. Not every one has the privilege of testing the promises under such circumstances; and do they not, because of missing this very kind of trial, often lack the dynamic which sends the Gospel home to the hearts of men? Our Gethsemanes qualify for effective work. Flesh and blood shrink from them, yet, 'tis true, that they add polished shafts to our bow, and lift us above the light afflictions of this world. He who has looked death in the face fears no shadow. We are never free till we have met and conquered the last enemy. There is an open field for all on the other side of that victory.

At the grey dawn the missionary was astir. He had slept, but the winds had not, nor did they sleep now. They still swept the plain, as if they had the contract of sending the snow back whence it came, and were bound to make the job pay. The coulees and bluffs were by this time well supplied.

Men enjoy saying: "I told you so"; and Mr. West had great satisfaction when he whispered that old saw into Billy's ear, and poured him out the balance of the oats. "You're all horse and no donkey," said he, clapping the pony's neck; but Billy had no use for blarney at meal-times, so, as plainly as a horse dared, he told his master to get out of the way.

"In due season ye shall reap if ye faint not." As the morning chased the night out of the storm, Mr. West knew that the promise was more than half fulfilled; and he bowed his knee beside the little sleigh in humble gratitude to Him who had been his protection during the darkness. When the greater had been given, the less would not be withheld. When the "Prince of the Power of the Air" and all the weird artillery of night had failed to break in the door of his soul, the home-going would not be hindered. With boldness he entered the Secret Place, and claimed deliverance from present trouble: "Lord Thou hast brought me through the night, see me safely home. Speak to the winds, that Thy poor, blundering servant may know where he is."

Is it not for our good that our prayers are sometimes shorn of their wordiness, and winnowed by the urgency of necessity? No time for Zion's gates: it is the present salvation we need.

Here, while Mr. West was yet speaking, the answer came. On rising from his knees, he found the storm changed to peace. Unbelief smiles at this, we know; but Mr. West's testimony abides. The Hearer of Prayer had "gathered the wind into His fists," and there was a great calm. On looking around, the smoke of a newly-lighted fire was seen swirling out of a chimney not more than a mile away. This was the moment for action, and in a trice the pony was again in his place between the shafts, eager to be off.

"Have patience, my lad," said the missionary; "it is bad manners to run away from sacred ground like a boy out of school. The Lord is holding back the



wind, and so there is no need of haste. How would it do to make an Ebenezer of your tie post? Just the thing, eh? So, quickly as numbed fingers would allow, he out with his pocket-knife and cut the letter B in the bark of the little poplar tree. In less than half an hour he was seated at the roaring fire whose smoke he had seen in the distance.

This house belonged to a German named Streich. Generous and warm-hearted, as all the prairie settlers are, he had seated Mr. West at the fire while he took the pony to the warm sod-stable and treated him to a drink of water and plenty of slough hay, to be followed by oats later on.

Mr. Streich was greatly interested in Mr. West's story. The two had met before; and now the missionary knew exactly where he was. Even with bad roads an hour's drive would take him home, and he was eager to be on his way.

After his body was in proper condition, he said to Mr. Streich: "I must not stay long with you this morning, my good friend. Someone may be asking herself many questions at home, and it may be that I can answer them better than anyone else. I'll make the remainder of the journey before breakfast yet, and when the pony is ready, we will take the road again. Your kindness this morning will not soon be forgotten."

"You not one foolish man, Mr. West, I think. What for you not get blizztars enough last night, that you wants more shuist right away? No, mein freint; when you goes out of mein howse you gets your breakfast here. Mein vife can make the table quick; and

when you goes away I tell her all over again, in good German, your story mit the snow."

"I thought the blizzard was over, Mr. Streich; all was quiet when I came in."

"Good, mein freint, that vas so. Something vas holding back that blizztar shuist like I holds mein broncho; and when you get in mein howse he let him go. Shoo, how you like that?"—and he opened the door to let the missionary see.

Sure enough the blizzard was on, fierce as ever. It raged over the plain, seemingly furious that business had been suspended for a whole hour, and that too for one of another Kingdom. For a moment the winds hissed defiance through the open door, and then made off, as if saying: "We'll keep you here all day, anyway!" But the real Master had another plan; so, before noon, all was changed, and a great calm rested on the prairie. Once more the sun shone down with a world's pardon in his face, and Mr. West, as he journeyed homeward, felt the very air pulsing with fulfilled promises.

"Oh, but this is grand," said he. "Last night and to-day—what a difference! This is the resurrection that I was looking for at midnight. How would the Perseverance of the Saints suit now, think you, Billy? If you were man instead of horse, I am sure you could say something on that subject. After last night you will be thinking that there is a kind of immortality for horses too—when they behave themselves.

"The survival of the fittest,' even in horses! Well, Billy, you may be pardoned for cherishing such an opinion under those stubby ears of yours, for we

were both taken care of last night. Mind you, though, it is not perseverance of horses we are talking about. It is the Perseverance of Saints, and unless you can put in a good claim, we will have to rule you out of the list. I'm thinking that a pony's heaven is like a corn crib, or a broad blanket of green prairie, with a cosy bluff here and there. Now, you need not be sulking over this; you like oats, you know you do—you are after them this very minute. A pretty saint that makes a god of his belly! Shame on you!

"Oh, yes, I see you hitching your shoulders and pointing back your ears, as much as to say: 'Maybe you are not a first-class saint yourself, sir.' Ho, ho! there's another hitch, and this time it is: 'Would that I could tell all I know. What brave tongues men have when they talk to horses—they know that horses cannot speak back. Oh, to be Balaam's ass for just five minutes! What I could tell!' Well, Billy, let's make it up. I see your point. If an ass was better than Balaam, a horse is better than either. Evidently this Balaam in the sleigh is not a saint according to your standard. Just so, my lad; but I'm not going to give up the hope of being one some day; so go along, and put an end to this palaver by getting me home.

"*Balaam.* That is rather a new name for a north-west missionary. He loved the wages of unrighteousness, I mind; and, when he would curse, his lips blessed. A blessing tongue and a cursing heart; is that a new thing under the sun? The devil never lies so basely as when he tells the truth; he never curses so bitterly as when he is forced to bless. Per-

haps he will see in the end that all the way along he has been blessing the world against his will. From Calvary, his blackest mark on human story, comes our hope of heaven.

"Yes, Balaam, I hear you saying, so strangely: 'How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel; as the valleys are they spread forth, and as gardens by the river side.' Well, that's bonnie, and maybe rather grand for my little prairie home; but yonder it is, and if you had a loveher sight than that you had a feast that day, Balaam, my man. You were keen on the pennies, but you saw what pennies cannot buy—the blessing of the Highest resting on the dwellings of his people. Even the little prairie shack becomes a palace when the King dwells within. Love's sunny fingers weave glory into the very pots and pans of home, and keep the angels busy 'tween heaven and earth. Such grace to mine be given!"

Such grace had been given to him and his; and although the night had been long and full of anxiety, the wing of the Covenant had been over all. Love's watchful eye had seen the home-comer afar off; and just as the sleigh drew near, Janet was in the doorway, showing questions all over her face.

"Well, Norman; back once more! Better late than never. Are you all right?"

"Right! Yes, just as right as I expect to be on this side Jordan. The Lord has been good to you, too, I see. You are not quite the lass that you were thirty years ago, but you seem inclined to something just as foolish as used to go on about that time—I'll not say what, but you will remember. When are you

going to set up for a weather prophet, Janet? But go on, Billy, we'll get rid of you first."

From home to home again had not been a very long journey. Mr. West had often driven farther in one day. But now, as he walked from the stable to his own house, he somehow found difficulty in throwing off the impressions of the night. He felt as if he had been long, and very far away, and *that* through an enemy's country. Things looked strange to him. So much of the foreign had crowded into his soul that the blink of his own fireside had been elbowed quite out of its place.

"Home again, home again, from a foreign shore," came to his mind. This he repeated many times, but it would not break the spell. He knew that it was his own home, and that his eyes rested on familiar things, but his inner economy would not take on with the old surroundings. The ragged guests of the night were not willing to depart; and he concluded that they needed some thunder-clap of authority to show them the door. So, suiting action to impulse, he filled his lungs with air and shouted up to heaven:

"When Zion's bondage God turned back,  
As men that dreamed were we;  
Then, filled with laughter was our mouth,  
Our tongue with melody."

That shout did the work; have you ever tried it? The *melody* was not the best, we admit, but when the shout went up every imp scampered to its own place; and then through the missionary's soul fairly danced the words: "He made a scourge of small cords, and drove them all out of the temple." What next?

Well, he could not hold in the *laughter*. The idea of little devils taking to their heels brought such a roar that the pig capered in its sty, while every hen and rooster chuckled in. Janet, too, on hearing the commotion, left her fry and appeared on the scene:

"Goodness sake, Norman; what's happened?"

"Oh, nothing," Janet; I was just warming up a bit."

"Nothing, and roaring like that! I do believe that the neighbours on twenty-four yonder are looking out to see if another earthquake or a hurricane is on. Man, if the wind has taken a slate off your roof, come inside. Better keep such things quiet as long as we can."

"Very good, Janet; but what do you say to a waltz before we go in?"—and before Janet had time to protest she was being whirled round the wood-pile in the most approved blizzard fashion.

"There, now," said he, steadying his wife till she got back her breath. "There, now, they'll think us both daft, won't they? But there's something getting too much fire, I fear." Then Janet flew into the house to save a dinner from going up in smoke.

When Mr. West had doffed his furs he declared that tilt round the wood-pile the best thing he had had for thirty years.

"Oh, yes," said Janet, busy setting the table, "the king was very glorious to-day; no wonder he is pleased with himself."

"David is no mean example to follow, Janet. I have a grand story to tell, and when you have heard it, you will be in for another swing round the wood-pile."

That dinner hour was no silent one. The whole

story, from the yellow sky to the waltz at the door, was rehearsed in detail ; and Janet began to think that if daftness in all men was but a matter of degree, her own man was less daft than any one on earth.

Fulfilled promises seem to lessen the distance 'tween us and the skies. Heaven bows in blessing, and the place beneath can never be the same again. The briers and thorns are rebuked, and the hope of another Eden brightens this dawn of Redemption.

## CHAPTER-IV.

### A SABBATH DAY'S WORK.

HOME was to Mr. West a happy recruiting place for mind and body. He had his own little collection of books, chiefly Puritan authors; but the Bible was to him as Ezekiel's roll; its words were sweet, and he did eat them. He kept well up with the thought of his age, but held that every true word was but a voice from Scripture, and he preferred that the truth should spring up to him straight from the Book itself. "Men," he would say, "are not here to experiment with life, but to live according to Scripture."

Especially did he enjoy speaking through the Word with the living Christ. 'Twas this life-touch which made his study an oft-baptized sanctuary, and an argument in favour of consecrated places. Is it not lack of belief in the sufficiency of Scripture that sets men off a-foraging the wide earth over for saving truth? God's way is not the way of human discovery, but the way of revelation and instruction through the Word. With faith in the Book to start with, the proof of its truth comes through living its precepts. "He that doeth His will shall know of the doctrine." This was Mr. West's creed, and to shift him from it would be



like moving Mt. Stephen ; for he had proven its truth in all the phases of life.

After eating the roll he was always ready to speak to the people. Sweet as honey to his own soul, he had unbounded confidence that the message would inspire others. Preaching was to him one of the luxuries of life, and it had to be very untoward weather indeed if he did not venture out to his stations on Sabbath. During a service of fifteen years he had missed very few appointments.

At the close of the week he felt as a vessel well filled with the burden of the people's needs. The all-pervading Spirit of the Kingdom kept gathering in, gathering in the people's needs, till he became more his whole field of labour than Mr. West the individual. Thus charged, he easily found a suitable text, and by this plan was always up to date ; and each man felt as if he were the one spoken to.

This prayerful, receptive attitude is not resorted to as it ought to be. It is an open door of surrender, which gives the Spirit a free hand to help us ; and what the Spirit brings rests sweetly on the mind like summer dew—no burning brain or throbbing eyes ; it blesses him who receives and him who receives again. Instead of the weary round of books we wait on God in prayer, and He drops the word for the people into the mind of the messenger. If we would labour less with books, and more with out windows open toward Jerusalem, our messages would not be so often out of touch with human needs.

Do we belittle study ? Not so. All we say is this : Our study should be a looking up for God either to

give new truth or approve of what we are reading. Reading of the Word, comments thereon, and mixing with the people are good for sermon-making; but it has also to be remembered that the Spirit can and does act as a go-between with regard to the need and the one who carries the blessing. How often we hear the words: "I wonder how the minister knew so well what to say to me to-day?" No wonder at all! The one who stirred up the need in you gave the messenger the word to speak; so, when the need and the message came together, there was the recognition of a mutual fitness and adaptation and evidence that the meeting had been pre-arranged.

This world is full of God, and the ever-increasing revelation of this truth is the chief incentive to Christian activity. The God of the Bible is the soul of the world; and fellowship with this soul is the soul of religion. The empty chamber in the heart is the mother of loneliness. Fill the vacant place with God, and soon you will find yourself wandering away from the saltless crowd to where He and nature can tell you their secrets. To be happy, though alone, is God's mark of nobility. Properly speaking, there are no empty places in our Father's house. He dwells in it all, and we live in Him as our home. In this lower world He has compressed the knowledge of His will into a Book, and it becomes us ever to hold an ear to the sacred oracle, that we may apprehend what is taking place in another world, and then turning tell a little of its glory to the children of man.

To show the way to the Father is the mission of the Christian ministry, and Mr. West in his preaching

aimed more at conversion than up-building. In a new country such teaching is specially required. Material beginnings are the order everywhere, and it is also essential that the A.B.C. of Christianity be untiringly dwelt upon. He said to himself: "We'll do the breaking first, and the back-setting and harrowing later on, lest the good seed be sown in vain." Like John the Baptist he preached the "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins," but was always quick to detect the trembling note of penitence, and say: "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." How many there were who heard him speak and were led by his words to follow Jesus will be better known some other day.

Sabbath morning always found him early astir. His day's work is before him now—three services: one at Mr. Brown's house, one at a schoolhouse, and another in a church near his own home. Thirty miles driving would complete the round: he often had more, but even these distances seem quite reasonable on the prairie.

Billy is now waiting at the door, well, and ready for his work. The morning arrangements have been made in almost unbroken silence. The burden of the Lord is upon his servant, and at such times all mirth is locked up in orthodox seclusion.

Janet is "on the help" too, but she has long ere this learned to act and not say much. So, this morning she saw him off with little more than a speaking face. Turning back into the house she said to herself: "Men like women none the less when, at times, they have little to say. He is never from home when the

Lord has him. No, no, miles and hours have little to do with it. But, oh, it's when hearts are parted that the wind blows weary in at the door." Then she stood still for a moment, and dropped a tear in memory of a dear companion of youth, who had sown roses and reaped thorns.

Yonder they go, over the snow. Billy's bells jingle merrily, but in the sleigh silence reigns. Earth's dead summer lies around tucked in garments clean and white as the righteousness of saints, and soul-tones of Sabbath whisper good-will to men; but the man in the sleigh is oblivious to it all. He has simply put himself under lock and key, and hung out the sign: "No salutations by the way." It is the King's business he is on, and dumb haste is the motto.

A man less in hand might have bowed and chattered to the people till his messages were off with the wind. Not so, this man; he exchanged civilities with that absorbed caution which meant a closed door till services were over.

This morning his reserve had been well maintained, and once behind the table in Mr. Brown's house he felt that his time had come. Promptly at the hour the service began, and from the very first word he knew that there stood before him an open door. The people felt this too, for the accumulated formality and earthiness of the past week soon fled away, and the fire of Pentecost played around the bare hearts of men. Some caught themselves wiping their eyes, others felt a strange suspense about the heart, and knew that their faces were paler than usual; but service over, all were conscious of having modified their opinions as to

the relative importance of things spiritual and material.

Usually when Mr. West's message had been given forth with liberty, he felt that he had gained more than he had given away. The play of soul during delivery had burnished and added to ~~the~~ word prepared at home, and the whole was locked up for use at next service. After his day's work he could dismiss the message, and open himself for a new in-filling.

Pioneer missionaries have an advantage over city and town ministers in this respect—one preparation is enough for the whole day. A new congregation is met together each time, and while the message is new to the people, it also grows in interest to the speaker himself. Where a sermon has been delivered only once, the minister knows that he has missed much by not preaching it the second time on the same day. He then remembers what he did not say that he should have said, and what he did say that he might have said better. With three appointments the "crooks" are all straightened out, and the teaching power added to at each delivery.

As service number two began, the hearers of number one were discussing the morning's sermon at their own firesides. The spirit of the meeting had lingered with some of them in quite an unaccountable way, and, what was unusual, too, it seemed easy for them to fall into conversation about what was said.

"I am glad that I was out this morning," said Mr. Barnes. "Mr. West has given me a lift for the whole week, and perhaps longer. For months back I have been halting between two opinions, and had almost decided to leave the prairie and strike for the Klón-

dike. They tell me that gold can be picked up there without working so hard for it; but I think that I am settled now."

"Yes," said Mrs. Barnes, with much interest, "if it had not been for me and the children holding you, you would have been yonder instead of here to-day. I hope he has helped you to get rid of that notion. What did he say?"

"Say? He said more than I can tell you. I saw by his looks when he drove up to the door that there was something in him, and there was. He was speaking on 'Hear the conclusion of the whole matter,' and among other things he said: 'If all the gold of the Klondike were ours we would not be better satisfied than we are on the prairie. It is not gold that men need first—it is Jesus Christ. Indeed,' said he, 'this scramble for gold is but a seeking for Him in a wrong way. Men misinterpret their own longings. They want something, they scarce know what, and they think gold will satisfy; but it is all a mistake. Solomon said so, and who can come after the King? When he, divinely qualified, failed in finding under the sun that good thing which man should do all the days of his life, how foolish for others to try. "Vanity of vanities," said this king, and his words are sounding down through the generations; yet many are in the fool's chase, hot as ever. Get yourselves right with God, and you will find that true happiness is conditioned by neither poverty nor riches.'

"That was a little of what he said to us; but there was more in the discourse than words. There was a something that one could feel and not say. Yes, and

it was that, I think, which brought me to a decision ; so I will just stick to the plough, and break up as much as I can next spring. If heaven is the first thing, we can find it better here than in the Klondike. There may not be so much gold, but, according to Mr. West, that does not matter, and I believe he is right."

"I'll second that with right goodwill," said Mrs. Barnes. "I have never been happier than since we settled on the prairie. My mother used to say, 'Enough is always plenty,' and we have never been without 'enough.' How would you like to have baby baptized next preaching Sabbath?"

"Very well, just the thing. I will be round by Mr. West's next week and will mention it to him."

Those qualities in a preacher which spice the message with soul, and cause it to spring up in after-thought, are not qualities of speech: they belong to the essence of the man, and are as subtle currents of life which insist upon and call for action. In other words: "It is the Spirit that quickeneth." There are times when the quickening forces are not present; but we can freely say that the word that morning was full of life, and virtue went forth for the healing of souls. Others had come to important decisions as well as Mr. Barnes.

The Lord loveth the Gates of Zion, that is certain; though whether this little, dusty, dingy schoolroom where the second meeting is being held should be dignified as a Gate of Zion is open to question. Be assured, however, that Mr. West had brought with him a Presence as well as a message, and, as will be readily understood, the mean, little place was transfigured, for

a time, at least. The grown people, although cramped in seats made for children, gave undivided heed to the sermon. The Church Triumphant seemed to be singing with them, and there was no slipping and flattening toward an "Amen" which gives up the ghost. No, no! not that day. They sang to the last word with spirit, and then, dismissed, turned homeward with hearts and hands nerved for the duties of making a new home. The very plough-handles are to know a firmer grip during the year.

A meeting of thirty or forty persons is not a large gathering, but the dispersing hither and thither has a magical effect on the winter waste of the prairie. The whiteness outlines them so distinctly that they seem much more numerous than they really are, and fancy runs off to the time when tens will be hundreds and hundreds thousands, to the time when the heavy silence of the Lone Land will be a thing of the past, and pioneer doings queer old thrums to weave into stories for the children.

Perhaps this missionary will live on in Saskatchewan long after the visible Mr. West is laid away in the broad bosom of the prairie—but dying will come soon enough, and we bury not our missionary before the time. He and Billy are still on present duty. Yonder they are now gliding homeward at the rate of eight miles an hour. On the outstretch Billy's gait is six miles; when listening to his master's harangues, four; but heading for home, eight is pleasure. Just two hours more and Billy's work will be done for another day. Not so his master's, however; for him there will be a short rest, and then the evening service.



On the home journey he again tried to be a mental blank. Two things helped him to this—one that he needed his remaining force for the evening service; the other, that, having had his sermon twice on the tongue already, he knew that it would flow in the old channel without confusion. So he held himself in check, with a view to the proper ending of the day's work.

If anything could draw Mr. West out of his wilful silence, surely that glowing sunset would do it. To speak of scenery on the prairie in the winter time may seem a waste of words, yet if the earth does not exhibit pictures, the sky does. When March sets in, as it is setting in now, it brings with it occasional promises of spring. Now and then, between hurrying winds, a Sabbath calm visits the plain, and the skies look down, as a mother would, to see if their child sleeps well under the white; and then, with radiant face, turn away, to come again when the sleep has been long enough.

This evening, as the missionary is speeding homeward, one of those sunsets is bidding the prairie good-bye for the night. Calm, tender, radiant, every song, leaf, and flower of springtime dwells in that face of promise. It is the face of a yearning Providence, just veiled enough to hide what we cannot bear as yet. Once or twice Mr. West looked back to bathe his soul in its glory, but fearing that it might have his thoughts off to Beulah Land instead of to the little, wooden church, he dismissed it all with a wave of the hand, and the words: "May all the Wests be like that at eventide." Then turning to Billy with a shout, he

said : " Stretch out, sir ; this is North-west Canada yet, and we'll not try our wings till they have grown a bit." Then, after the glory had departed, came the half-expressed words : " They saw no man, save Jesus only."

Country churches in the West, many of them, are seated for about one hundred people, and in fine weather are often well filled. This evening a full gathering awaited Mr. West. The sleighing was good, the weather mild, and the people had taken on the mood of church-going. Mr. West had, for some time, ministered to this people, and his teaching, as before stated, had been such as to show the danger of remaining outside the City of Refuge when the avenger was abroad. He had shown them the open door, but till recently they had not made speed to his mind. Now they were wakening up, and the large meeting this evening was due to other reasons than good weather. The same Spirit that brought the people's needs to the messenger was now bringing the people themselves.

As spring, now and then, looked through the restlessness of March, so had gleams of Gospel truth been looking through the chill of human nature. As the skies, fitfully, gave promise of a revived earth, so had he seen flittings of Covenant joy light the faces of his people. They had not wholly ignored his teaching, but for a time had promptly shelved it for future consideration. But as the days went on, and the newness of prairie life wore off, they began now and then to take some of the lessons from the shelves of memory, and give them a stray turn in their minds.

The seed had been sown in faith, and could not well be lost. The time of springing forth was not yet, but the time for asserting itself in the soil had come. The Spirit was busy bringing to remembrance what had been received in days gone by. Men and women were coming into that state of mind in which they did not simply entertain the thought of life and death, but where it possessed and mastered them. Now and then they were drawn away to other things, but ere they knew they were always turned to the one theme again.

Mr. West had noticed this, and was planning a communion service.

This night, as he showed how surrender to God was the first step in human duty; he felt that a hearty response was being given by the people. He could see in their faces that decisions had been come to, and at the close of the service, as if inspired by a sudden assurance, he called out: "Who is on the Lord's side?" and almost the whole congregation rose to their feet.

"Very good," said he, "very good; now I want to tell you that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper will be dispensed here two weeks from to-night. You will then, all of you, have the opportunity of putting the public seal on your profession. May his own Spirit keep you, and help you to sit with joy at his table."

There was not much hand-shaking at the close of this service: the impression was too deep and sacred for such shallow maneuvering. Indeed Mr. West might be counted peculiar in this respect. He considered hand-shaking too sacred an operation to be used, as he would say: "As the click of a turn-gate, to

count the people out of church one by one;" so he never adopted the novelty. Having introduced the people to Christ, he thought it good manners to keep out of the way himself.

As with an individual, so with a congregation; there are times when the whole after life is turned into a new channel. The Spirit's discipline of years may gather into one service, breaking through the shell of reserve, and demanding open acknowledgment. When inward experiences are ready to be born, Grace takes the throne, and men write the vow of allegiance as by their own hand.

Such was this evening's record in the little church. It was to stand out for that congregation as a mark from which to count the years. As for the climax reached, it was, as has been seen, no hastily-worked-up sensation; but Grace becoming too strong for inward control. It *had* to manifest itself, and did it in this way.

The plan of gauging the spirit of a meeting by standing vote is not a good one, and should be sparingly resorted to; but here it was quite natural. When the Spirit takes strong hold of the people in answer to the preaching of the Word, that can be done which at other times would be absurd. The people were quite honest in what they did, and Mr. West hoped that private conversation with them would result in large additions to the Church by profession of faith.

Here ended a day of missionary labour; a glorious harvest day after much toil; a day with storms before and behind; a day when, with nature hushed, God did speak peace to his children. We could tell you of far

different experiences ; but it was Mr. West's nature to forget trials, and magnify the Grace that saves. He had not been without his songs in the night ; but now, it seemed that the Sabbath had been made king over all the days of the week. That night he went home knowing the blessed weariness which comes from serving a much-loved Master. If he sleep, he shall do well, and we may hear of him in the morning.

May the people sleep well too, for it is the first night in which some of them rest under the wing of the Covenant. Happy the dweller on the prairie who has found a higher fellowship than that of his brother man ; happy the one whose faith peoples the solitude with spirits that whisper to his heart the love of God—especially if he come into soul-touch with Him whose presence turns any kind of surroundings into a heaven. No blank loneliness for such a man, no unhinging of the mind. The anointing love will be as dew to his soul and marrow to his bones. No insane asylum for this man ; and here we touch on tender ground, for the want of religion has played havoc with the mental balance of many a lonely son and daughter of the plain. Can a man with a vision bounded by this world only, and separated from his fellows, preserve an equilibrium of mind ? The odds are against him. None know the preciousness of a real faith better than those who live by it on the prairie.

In thickly-populated parts there is too often an attempt to put society and brotherhoods in the place of religion. Thousands upon thousands are being whirled into darkness by the everlasting dance of the world. The way to God is by the way of solitude. " I

will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and there will I speak comfortably to her." Remembering this, we can understand how the prairie may be an open door to blessedness. Shut off from local company, the soul finds Him who is everywhere.

The devil's substitute for religious services is Sabbath visiting—and a very plausible missionary he is. "Ah," says he, "yours is a hard lot, drudging away here alone day by day. Hitch up your team, and drive your wife and children over to your neighbour's house." But the preaching there is No. 1 hard—homesteads, pre-emptions and the like; and the visitors, home again, are somehow more lonely than before. Although they have seen their neighbour, they have, as far as mind goes, not been outside the old grind of the week, and, jaded, have to take up the hoe again on Monday morning.

## CHAPTER V.

### A WEDDING.

MORNING found Mr. West, for Monday, frêsher than usual. He had slept well, because, in preaching, he kept *himself* out of the way; and allôwed his Master to use him. Restlessness during Sabbath night often comes from needless friction during the day; and friction is often the result of self taking too much control. To be self-moved during preaching means worry afterward; because it has in it the absurdity of a creature taking the place of the Holy Spirit. The motive power being wholly inadequate, the result is a very rough handling of the nerves. Complete surrender makes self only an instrument heartily operated by Divine wisdom and skill; then the work is pleasant, and the after-rest profound.

"Well, wife," said Mr. West at the breakfast table, "we had a grand time yesterday, a happy time at all the stations. The Lord was with us, and I am not sure but that the millennium is at hand. Those March winds have a note of spring and the singing of birds. 'Dinna ye hear it?' 'I will arise and go to my Father.' Yes, some of them are coming home. The reel of the feast, with the fatted calf, once more on earth. . . . 'Dinna ye hear it?'" . . . And

then the bite had to wait a bit for the music to swell away into the Father's house.

"I hope you are not going to have me round the wood-pile again, Norman; the symptoms are grave enough. Try some of this toast, and maybe they will wear off."

"You cannot keep the pulse down by stuffing toast on the top of it, Janet. I see your eye brisking for the whirl, but the tantrum seldom takes my heels on Monday, and I think we will have to delay the exhibition till a more fitting season—how would you like a drive to town instead? It is a fine morning, and we have had no mail for a day or two."

"That would certainly be more befitting a minister's wife," said Janet. "When would you like to start?"

"Oh, any time you say; or if the afternoon would suit you better so be it."

"Well, then, say two o'clock, Norman."

Promptly at the hour Billy could be seen running his master and mistress over to the village, some miles away from their home. The roads were good, the day bright, and the chattering in the little sleigh young as the rippling of a brook. Skins grow old, hearts never; their dew is from the upper heaven. Billy is escaping his theology this day; indeed, the conversation would not figure very creditably under that head. Men do not grow much, theologically, in the company of women—lucky, too; it keeps them from swelled heads and lean hearts. For changing the blue of Monday into the shine of life, try a drive over the prairie with a sprightly, womanly woman. Oh, ye pussy-wants-a-



corner old bachelors of the preacher persuasion, try it. Get married, and try it, I say. It may yet button up the under lip, and keep the wails from becoming chronic.

"Well, Janet," said he, "here we are. You attend to your shopping, and I'll run over to the post-office—perhaps call at Mr. Green's, too, for a chat. In an hour we can be on our road home again."

At this time of the year the trails are much elevated. All the winter long they keep building up and building up, till they are quite above the general level of the prairie. This makes the passing of teams a very uncertain operation, and where ladies are involved, sometimes quite interesting.

"I hope, Janet, that Providence will give us the road to ourselves to-day. I am not particularly fond of seeing angels in the snow."

"That's fine, Norman," said she, looking him full in the face; "but I sometimes think that if certain men had more sense and less palaver their beards would not be so much whiter than their heads."

"It's a mercy that women haven't beards, Janet. But I'm forgetting. What do you think is going to happen? Read that"—and he handed her a letter that he had received at the post-office.

As Mrs. West read, her face brightened into summer.

"Well, well," said she; "that has given me a lift. They will be a well-matched pair."

"Indeed they will," said he, "and when that comes off there will be two lucky women in the world anyway."

"There you are again, Norman. Don't you mind what Scripture says of those who exalt themselves? Think soberly. Mend in time, lest—lest . . . But, what is this coming? A horse and cutter, I do declare!" and she began to grip the side of the sleigh in prospect of the angel picture aforesaid.

Mr. West pulled to the side in time, stopped, and there they sat with the sleigh in a very sidling position. It was a young man who met them, and, when just past, he turned in the cutter and said:

"Good day, Mr. West; you are the very man I want to see."

The missionary knew the voice, but on turning to speak, down went his side of the sleigh, rolling him out full length on the snow, and leaving his wife holding on to the upper edge of the seat, brave as man. He, however, having held on to the reins, soon had the sleigh and its remaining occupant back on to the level road.

"There," said he, "you mind the pony till I speak to Mr. Jamison."

"How are you, Mr. Jamison? I did not know who it was till I heard the voice."

"A word from the sleigh was all I wanted, Mr. West; there was no need of getting out into the snow with such haste. Sorry to have troubled you that far."

"No trouble at all, Mr. Jamison. I am glad to see you. How are they all at home?"

"Oh, very well, Mr. West; very well, indeed. I have been out to your house, but, of course, found no one at home. I dropped a letter in the post office for

you on Saturday, but fearing that you might not get it in time, I drove out to see that all was right."

"Oh, yes, it is all right, Mr. Jamison. I have the letter in my pocket, and, all being well, will see you through on Wednesday."

"Thank you, Mr. West," and the young man drove away, leaving the missionary to resume his journey homeward.

"Shake the snow off your coat, Norman, before you come in again," said Janet, with some show of victory in her eye. "Yon was a fine spread you made—a bonnie angel, indeed! You see what boasters come to."

"If folk would always fall into the snow, Janet, they would not be dirtied," said he, and in a few minutes more they were home.

Wednesday came, but it was winter still. Now and then during the past days spring had breathed upon the earth, and drawn back again ere the snows had felt its power; but the time was steadily drawing near when bridal flowers would deck the plain. Mr. West thought of this, and then of the two young people who had decided to become one that day by the outward ceremony of marriage. The distance to the house of Mr. Watson, the bride's father, was about fifteen miles, and he must start in good time to be home again before nightfall.

"Well, Janet, I see by your away-from-home look that you would like to be among them to-day. Your reasons for staying at home may be good enough, but how would it do to muster up and go yet? Billy, I am sure, will behave himself well, and I promise to stay

in the sleigh if I can, and talk just as I used to do many years ago. What do you say?"

"Indeed, Norman, I do not deny but that I would like to see Bessie Watson married. I've known her for five years, and a more winsome rose was never plucked on the prairie. The spring has come earlier for young Jamison than for other folk, and I hope that there may never be a winter in all their married life. May heaven bless them both, and Bessie for me; but I cannot go with you to-day." Then she dropped a mother's tear on a little parcel which she held in her hand. "Take this to her for me, Norman, and tell her that she has with it all that my poor blessing can give."

"Well, Billy," said Mr. West, when fairly on the road, "there's no lack of variety in your rounds—to the House of God, to the market, and now to a wedding. It's rather a mixed-up life that you live, isn't it?"

Billy hitched his shoulders at his master's voice, as much as to say: "Humph, the mixing is in the sleigh, I think. I don't see much difference in going to one place or another, unless it be that you talk less when I take you to church. Men are wisest, maybe, when, like horses, they do not say much."

"Ho, ho," said his master, "I see that your breakfast has not agreed with you; but, lad, don't you know that both men and horses should wear smiles when a wedding is on? Come now, no more sulks; brace up.

"Why people marry is another question—some for money, some for position, some for love, but none for misery; yet, many find it. Love is religion when

surrender is made to the right one. Loss of love is loss of life; but disappointments in a heaven here have often led to the seeking and finding of a Love that is eternal. When love reigns below, this earth will be a heaven, for love is the fulfilling of the law.

"How is that, Billy? Balaam's ass would not have needed to speak with man's voice if he had been treated as a well-behaved ass should have been, would he? How would you like a faster gait, eh? I think we can make Mr. Watson's house before noon. But look out for this sleigh! The man has wheat, and you will have to give him the whole road. Come now, turn out; none of your half-breed ways. Pull right out to the level, sir, and don't you be spilling me this time. There now, stand still till the sleigh goes by."

"Fine day, Mr. West," said the man on the load, as he drew rein for a word with the missionary. "You seem to be on interesting business this morning."

✎ "Now, Mr. Nelson, what makes you say that? I hope you are not reading your own conclusions into me, and seeing what is in your own mind."

"Oh, let me tell you, Mr. West; you are not going to escape so easily. Don't be thinking that I can't tell when a minister has a spicy job on hand. Why, it is sitting in your eye there as distinctly as a bird on a girl's hat. No, no, that won't do. You will have to learn the ways of the world a little better before you can hide your interest in weddings."

"Have your own way, Mr. Nelson. The cantrips of youth are not all folly. No, they are spirit and life, and it is worth while for the likes of you and me to lilt among the lads and lasses betimes, even if, like the

crabs, we have to back up a long way to do it. You are getting your granary emptied for another crop, I see."

"Yes, this is my last load, and I am glad of it. Sleighing cannot hold out much longer now. We had a grand season last year, and I hope we may all be worthy of so much blessing. Things are going on fine just now. I was not out last Sabbath, but the youngsters came home in great glee. I think three or four of them will join at next Sacrament. Maybe I'll tell you some other day how grateful I am for all the light and joy that the Lord has sent to our home through you, Mr. West. Good-bye just now, and may the bird never leave your eye, for I believe it has come to you from the Tree of Life."

"Thank you," said Mr. West, as he drove away. "Grey hairs know the worth of a few cheering words."

"Did you hear that?" said he to the pony, "and from the likes of Mr. Nelson, too. Yes, you heard it, of course you did; and now how about those cheap hints as to the ass being in the sleigh instead of between the shafts? Shame on you! Now, try to make amends by putting eight miles into the next hour." Then with a swish of the whip in the air they were off at a right good wedding-day jingle over the remainder of the road.

Billy had made his eight miles an hour and a little more when Mr. Watson's house came into view. It was no new road or strange place that the missionary was going to. For two years he had held service in that large and comfortable log dwelling, and to go on such a trip was like congratulating the whole settle-

ment at once. The Sabbath services had twined many a thread of friendship among the people, and it only needed an occasion of this kind to bind them all into one.

Don't be vexed when we tell you that Mr. Watson was a "Drumtochty man." We do so at the risk of being very prosy, to be sure ; but it was even so. He was born in Perth, Scotland, crossed the ocean when quite young, married a Scotch lass in Ontario, and remained there till the youngest of ten children had grown to what he would call "a lump of a boy." Then the duty of peopling the waste places of the earth was laid upon him ; and Saskatchewan was no mean gainer that day when this thorough-going, Scotch-Canadian family settled on her plains.

When the missionary drew rein at the door, Mr. Watson was out at once, followed by a grown-up son—one to welcome the missionary, and the other to take the pony to the well-known corner, where he had never yet known empty heck or manger.

"Right glad tae see ye, sir," said Mr. Watson ; "but this is an awsome hoose, breakin' business ye are on. Ye're weel eneuch on Sawbath days, bit, man, I wunner how ye sleep at nichts efter sic wark as this. Come away in ; ye'll need warmin' onyway, and, my certies, there'll be nae stint when the guidwife gets her tongue on ye !"

Mrs. Watson was waiting just inside the door. A more motherly heart than hers never pulsed within flesh and blood. She had lived by love all her days, and in her declining years looked as Eve might have done had she not touched the forbidden fruit. When

the minister entered she fell to unwrapping him, as if he were a very little laddie, and not able to do the first thing for himself.

"There now," said she, after the furs were all carefully laid away. "Come in here first. Ye'll no mind, and the cook-stove'll be better for what ails ye." Then she opened the oven door, laid a piece of wood along the iron, and said, "There now, take this chair and draw furrit. Pit yer feet on the wud, and get yersel' inta fettle, for it's fine wark ye hae afore ye the day. Warm yer han's too—dinnlin' fingers make bad knots, ye ken. We want a'thing dune in richt Covenanter fashion, seein' that it hes come tae this. How is't that Mrs. West didna come? I've been wearyin' tae see her—but the way is lang and the roads bad. I mind, she wad 'a' been here if she could."

"Indeed she would, I saw that, Mrs. Watson; but she sent her regrets, and this for the bride," and he handed her the parcel which he had been entrusted with.

She took the gift with a "Thank you," but the word "bride" brought the tear to the eye, and she had to turn away to hide what only mothers can feel. Slowly she went upstairs, wondering why weddings and funerals should chase one another about in her thoughts.

"My dear wee lassie a *bride*, and shuin tae lilt her sangs in anither hoose! It's next tae bein' widowed!" Then she turned into a side room and closed the door.

Bessie was not a wee lassie to any one else, but that day behind that door the mother treated herself to an old-time croon over the cradle. It seemed to be



the last time, and as the heart-strings thrilled once more over the memory of pet names, baby talk, girlish romps, and dawning womanhood, she seemed to saunter along a beautiful lane, where rose-buds shot out from among the leaves, appearing more and more to be they were open flowers. It was a moving dream, tenderly singing its way through vanished years. Then the word *bride* came back, and the dream gave place to the real fact of the day—Bessie was to be married.

"Oh, well," said she, "why should I be as though a funeral were on? I have two left, and she is happy, I see. The Lord kens best, and I'll try to be content." With a sigh of relief she then came forth as from the presence of One who speaks comfortable things to His people in secret.

"She has warmed me sure enough," said the minister, when left alone with Mr. Watson, "but not in the way you hinted. Man, have you forgotten yourself so far as to speak evil of your wife?"

"Ah, weel," said Mr. Watson, slyly, "if yer warm be thankfu'; but dinna whustle afore ye're through the wud."

By this time the neighbours began to gather. One by one they came, till scarce a man, woman, or child for ten miles round was left behind. The table was spread in an adjoining room, and at one o'clock the happy but self-conscious two were ushered into the parlour to face the man of authority, with the licence in his hand.

As the bride and bridegroom stood there before the kindly array of witnesses—he in his rustic manly beauty, she in the pink and white of twenty—there

arose in vision the spring of all romance, the garden of Creation's youth, the first wedding day, when the great Minister of all did, Himself, join the hands of His two spotless children.

Mrs. Watson stood through the ceremony just, as it were, at the head of the lane where in her closet dream she had seen the roses in their untouched beauty. Fancy filled the air with their fragrance, and she knew that God was in the room. The congratulations which followed the ceremony were, in this case at least, truly *Amens* to the Father's blessing.

Need we go farther?—to the feast or to the merry-making? Let it suffice when we say that the missionary reached his home by the darkening, and that spring came on in earnest the next day. Have weddings anything to do with putting an end to winter? This at least seemed a good omen in favour of Mrs. West's prayer—"May there be no winter in all their married life."

## CHAPTER VI.

### A BAPTISM OF FIRE.

ON returning from the wedding Mr. West felt that for him almost the first thing was the witness-box. Of course, Janet knew enough not to pounce upon him as soon as he entered the door, but he clearly saw what was coming. The special care to have him warmed speedily, and the extra Martha step in getting the tea ready, said as plainly as words: "Now, my man, after you are comfortably settled at your tea, you have to go over again all this day's proceedings." So he resolved to acquit himself as amiably as possible, although he had some misgivings as to the result.

The examination was creditable to both. To be sure he stumbled a little over the cut and colour of the bride's dress; but on the whole he came through it, surprised at the good showing he had made (trust a woman for cross-questioning in a case of this kind!). Maybe the tea had something to do with the success, but be certain of this: Janet had never before such hopes of her husband taking a sensible view of life.

"Yes," thought she, "there are other things in the world besides preaching, praying, and pouring over books." He is finding that out, I am glad to see."

But it was a damper when he broke off in this

fashion: "Well, Janet, are you through? It is my turn now, I think. Has anyone called to-day?"

"Yes; Mr. Barnes called about the baptism of their child; and Miss Clockie wants to join the Church. She would like a talk with you before the Communion."

"Very good," said he, "very good. The Lord is busy among them. Oh, but it is grand to see the spring coming in like this. It seems as though Heaven were holding out her arms, and earth were running into them, glad to be home again. 'As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.'"

Mr. West had a way of talking in one breath of the revivings of nature and the quickenings of Grace. It pained him to see men lagging behind in their praise of God, when all nature was responding so heartily to the call of spring. He felt that man should lead and that nature should join in till the very trees were clapping their hands. Out of this order, the song of Creation was to him lacking in all its major notes. We do not mean by this that Mr. West was musical. Not at all; yet he had a sense of harmony, and knew somehow when things were out of joint.

It may be well, however, to say that the song of spring was to him not merely the song of the prairie. He had spent his youth in a land of rock, mountain, gorge, and stream, where the high-tide of nature's resurrection was quite otherwise than that of the plain. So his ear caught more than the prairie could give.

In springtime the response of earth to heaven is always after its kind. A land of forest, mountain, and stream gives loud and emphatic obedience to the call from above. She leaps out with a flourish of trumpets

and a glad hurrah from the hill-tops. With a flash and a shout she sets winter at devouring itself like the Gentile hosts before Gideon—a dashing youth is this, bounding from prayer into praise and vigorous action.

Our prairie spring is not this unrestrained youth; it is rather the good, good boy who says his prayers in the morning, and not very much all the rest of the day. No roaring streams to speak of, no flourishing of forest worthy the name, no gathering of song-birds to rejoice over a dead winter and an opening summer. No, this is yet the great silent land all the year round. True, the heavens smile upon it with exceeding kindness; true, the streams run a little, the robins pipe a little, and the crocuses rise betimes to kiss the cheek of an April morning; yet the whole awakening is one of languid silence as compared with many other parts of the world.

Spring in its infancy is always a tyrant. It mewls, fumes, laughs, and crows by turn; it deals out slush, bad roads, and shuts people in, till such time as the ground is ready for the plough. During these house-cleaning days Mr. West had missed one of his Sabbath appointments, but succeeded in getting to the service at which Mr. Barnes' child was to be baptized.

Mr. and Mrs. Barnes had been a little puzzled over the name to be given to their boy. They thought of the sermon which had decided them to remain on the prairie, and they wished the name, in some way, to remind them of that decision.

"How would it do to call him after the missionary?" said Mr. Barnes. "I was thinking of my brother George who died, but that might not fit. Norman

West is the name, I think. As Robbie Burns would say, 'It clinks,' and it seems to me just the name—Norman West Barnes."

"Agreed," said Mrs. Barnes; "and then, if it comes to the short, it will be Nor'-West Barnes—another *clink* you see."

"Well, you are a genius, Clara, sure enough," said he, tickled over the further *clinking* which she suggested. "The boy has got his name, and no mistake." So he was called Nor'-West Barnes, as belonging to the first generation of prairie manhood.

During those unpoetic days, disowned by both summer and winter, Mr. West also visited those who were looking forward to the Communion service in the little church near his own home. He had been rather unfortunate in choosing the time, but where love is, difficulties vanish, and the gathering was quite up to his expectations. It was a meeting at which the experience already mentioned was repeated and intensified by the breaking of bread. Fifteen new members were enrolled, and partook of the Sacrament for the first time.

This little wooden building had become a sanctuary of which it could be truly said: "This man and that man were born in her." Holy fire had also been burning away the dross from the people, giving them the spiritual eye to discern the Lord's body, and the little temple must surely be taken under Covenant care. If the Father watches over the dust of His people, He cannot be unmindful of the place where they were born.

As the days wore on, the snows ran away into little

lakes to make eyes for the prairie. The wild fowls too, returned to their paradise, and the crocus, with rare faith, thrust itself up into this fickle world. What if it bloom only for a little while! What if frost find its heart as the sun goes down! What if fierce winds whip its life away! Better to have bloomed and died, than never to have bloomed at all. Brave little heart, thy courage deserves a longer life! Smiling there in the brown grass of an old summer, teach us thy lesson, that we, too, amid the wreck of youth's dreams, may hope on, and thy short life will not be in vain. Let us bloom to-day, if we can, taking no thought for the morrow.

One day Mr. West had arranged to do some visiting, but the wind being high, he turned aside to his books instead. "Luther on the Galatians" was a favourite of his, and he soon became oblivious to the outer world as he threaded his way through the intricacies of faith and works. He believed that Luther was moved by a sort of after-Patmos inspiration, which made him the man of his time. He felt the pulse of the seer through his writings, and the vision of faith fired him with hope of another Reformation. He sniffed the battle from afar, and felt that Armageddon was coming on apace.

"Yes," said he, lifting his eyes from the book to take a far-away look into the future, "I see it coming, with confused noise and garments rolled in blood, to try them that dwell on the face of the earth." But the eye of the body soon chased away the visions of the mind, for, on looking up, he saw clouds of smoke hurrying past the window. At once he knew the

meaning of this, and the awakening from his dream was rude enough. He was, as it were, taken by the cuff of the coat and jerked back through a century of time.

"A prairie fire, I do declare! And such a day! Some poor fellow will be sorry before night." With hat in hand he rushed to the door to take in the situation. The smoke was already quite dense, and he knew that the fire could not be far away—in half an hour it would sweep past his own dwelling. He had no fear on this score; however; he knew the tricks of the prairie, and had plowed a wide strip of ground around his house and stable. This he knew was sufficient for his own protection, but how about the settlers? Were their fire-guards in order? When the wind swerved a little, he could see neighbour Riskit out with his team circling round his buildings like desperation; but it was no use. The tongue of fire which leaped toward the skies a few minutes later told, too plainly, that once more the procrastinator had been caught.

"Janet!" cried he in at the door. "I'm off."

Janet had been busy in a back part of the house, and knew not what was going on without; but on going to the door she had no difficulty in understanding what he meant by being off. "Yes," said she, "he'll be needed, and I'll have to abide by the stuff."

On the fire came like a single line of red coats chasing the foe, leaping, reaching, and firing as they ran, leaving blank desolation behind. It was an anxious moment for Mrs. West, notwithstanding her faith in the fire-guard; but soon all danger was over, and she



breathed freely. Only for a moment, however, for as she saw the back part of the fire roll away to the east, it swept under and round about the little wooden church which had so lately been hallowed by the Master's presence. What was worse, she saw that as the flames made by the quick-burning grass hurried on, there remained smoke issuing from under the building. She shouted, but there was no one to hear; she ran, but what could she do? In a few minutes more the fire was beyond control, and the little church home was blotted out.

The care of what we call our own often shuts out the thought of what is God's. One would think that the birthplace of saints would be carefully guarded; but, alas, in this case it was not so! The people had been discussing the erection of a new church, and it seemed as if the Lord had taken the old one in time, lest it should be turned into a granary, a stable, or some other thing of earth. He sometimes takes His own away in a chariot of fire.

One needs to be on hand after a prairie fire, to know how things look when the "heavens are as brass, and the earth beneath as iron." Brown is bearable, but a funeral from sky to sky! that puts singing out of fashion; and we come to thank the Lord that He has made the earth green instead of black.

Mr. West returned from the fire with his coat under his arm, weary, and much the same colour as the burnt prairie. Certainly he would not have adorned the pulpit just then, but the little furrows down his cheeks, among the black, showed very plainly that sweat of brow is sometimes as necessary for the protection of bread as for the earning of it.

"We had a tough time, sure enough," said he to Janet, "but I think most of the neighbours have come through safely. I am sorry for Mr. Riskit; but we have reason to believe that this is nearly all the damage done in the settlement. You have saved the stuff, I see. Had you much trouble?"

"No, none at all; but I think the Lord has surely forgotten His own property in caring for that of His children. Maybe I don't know, but it's gone"—and she looked over to where the fire was licking up the fragments of the church.

"So it is," said he. "Well, now, that *does* take the shine out of our victory. The fire has had more of its own way than I thought; the church never once came into my mind. It's gone up, sure enough. Better up than down, though; and it may be that the blaze will not hurt us in the end. Thus resigned, he set himself to cleaning up a bit, and concluded that his Master's will concerning him for the remainder of that day and the coming night was sleep.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE NEW CHURCH.

IN a few weeks the prairie was all the greener because of its scorching. The tender blade sprang up everywhere, and soon the newly carpeted earth was fit for a princess to walk upon. Is it not always so, that from the black ashes of trial and chastisement tenderness springs? It is only after the fire that we become as little children; only after sadness that the heart feels better; only after a cross that we wear a crown. Is suffering a necessity in this life? Have we to travel the same road as the Man of Sorrows? The body cannot be healed without pain, and how can the soul? It is not for us to *choose* suffering; no, we shrink from it; and yet eternity may be too short to praise the hand that lays it upon us. Out of the ashes of self comes the Eden that blooms eternally.

The loss of the church, from a money point of view, was a small one, but the associations made it keenly felt. Seeding was on, and all action in the way of rebuilding would have to be deferred for at least two months. In the meantime services were arranged for in a settler's house, which had been heartily offered for the purpose.

Mr. West knew the pulse of the people, and doubted not that a new church would be ready before the winter set in. Faith in man is next to faith in God, and perhaps more rare. To know God is to trust Him; to know man, intimately, is to lose faith in him. According as Christ is woven into our very being are we to be trusted—so far and no farther. It was on this quality in the people that the missionary based his conviction that a new church would soon be erected. Nor was he disappointed; for, when the wheat-fields were green, and the strain of labour slackened, a meeting was called with a view to immediate action. At that meeting Mr. West was given the chair, and, after prayer for guidance, the whole question was fully discussed.

"Let's have a stone one," said Mr. Perth, "and cheat the prairie fires after this. There is plenty of stone for the hauling; we can do that without paying out money for it, and, as the settlement is now well defined, there should be no danger of the building getting out of centre for the people as the old one did. I think that the House of God should be the best building in the settlement. Our own better buildings will follow; and perhaps all the more speedily because we attend to the church first. I believe that loyalty to heaven brings blessing to earth, just as in olden time, so I move that we all pull together and put up a right good, roomy, stone church. The cost may be considerable, but if we are straightened for cash, the Church and Manse Board may give us a lift."

Mr. Boyd rose to second the motion, and said: "I

heartily agree with the proposal, and feel that I am in accord with the majority, if not with the whole, of this community when I approve of the motion before the meeting." Then it was carried without dissent that a building of a certain size, with walls of stone and lime, be erected.

"Now," said the chairman, "what about the site?" and with this Mr. Brown, who belonged to the appointment lying west, arose and said, "I came to-day to see if anything could be done in the way of joining these two stations. My house is open for service as in the past; yet, I thought that, as we are going to build anyway, a site farther west might suit both appointments. The old meeting-places are only ten miles apart, and I notice that three-fourths of those who attend services have their homes between the two points. A church, say, four miles to the west of the old site would, in my opinion, suit the convenience of all parties concerned. Besides, I may mention that I am authorized by the people of our settlement to say that if such an arrangement is made, they will help to the very best of their ability."

After thorough discussion this also was carried, and Messrs. Perth, Brown, and Boyd were appointed a committee to choose a site. Promises of nearly two thousand dollars in money and labour were also given, and from the enthusiasm of the people it could be counted on that another church would adorn the prairie as soon as circumstances would allow.

A mind made up is the work half done. Indeed, with honest, energetic, and purposeful men, work after that is pleasure, and the mind finds rest in the doing of

it. So thoroughly were the people moved in this matter that they were ready, heart and hand, to begin as soon as the site was selected. They had not long to wait, on this account, for next day Messrs. Perth, Brown, and Boyd could be seen skirmishing here and there over the prairie like boys after gophers.

"I like bluffs," said Mr. Brown; "but we will have to grow our own trees, for we must locate near here, and there are no bluffs short of two miles."

"How would this do?" enquired Mr. Boyd; "here is a corner stake and cross-roads. There is a fine view in front, and as for the rear—talk of a bluff!—what ails you at this, Mr. Brown?" As he spoke he stepped aside and shook, playfully, a little solitary poplar tree which seemed to have had a hard struggle to be there at all. "Why, I declare, here is your brand, too! Just look at that—B for Brown; do you see?" (Somebody had been there at another time, and had cut the letter B in the bark of the tree.) "You for one must be satisfied with this site, Mr. Brown. The tree is a measly-enough looking specimen to be sure; but if we choose here, it will stand within the church grounds, and with care and company a famous bluff may adorn the property in a few years."

"I'll accept the site," said Mr. Brown, "and will stand sponsor for the tree. It looks as if it deserved some care for the rest of its life, and if the church is erected here, I'll see that it gets proper attention. If B stands for Brown, I'll be father to the tree—Perth and Boyd being witnesses."

"That little lake in front has a fine smile on its face," put in Mr. Perth, "and for my part I have no

objection to the site; and I am sure that when the people see it they will be satisfied too. The land belongs to Mr. Roger, and he said to me last night that if we chanced on his section, he would give without price one, two, or three acres as we might require. I think, putting all things together, we could not do better than fix on this corner."

"Agreed," said all the rest; and the location being decided upon, the way was clear for building operations.

"Janet," said Mr. West one day as he returned from a visit to the new church, now in course of erection; "I like the situation well; it seems so home-like already. I cannot tell why, but one feels as if the Master had been there staking out the foundation, and is now lingering around till the building is ready for use. It's grand, too, to see the people thinking it pleasure to do the Lord's work. The stones of the prairie are running together like Ezekiel's dry bones, and getting themselves into the walls as by the Spirit of God. That gratis work which they are doing is a means of grace, and is preaching far better than the missionary ever did. The Lord, as usual, is bringing good out of evil. His ways are not our ways, but they are better ways. The way of fire is not always the way of destruction. Yon dismal black spot of the old church has begotten a new stone one."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A MEETING OF PRESBYTERY.

ANOTHER Sabbath has blessed the prairie, and added itself to the Eternal Rest. It has kissed the wild June roses, and left them blushing as love in its youth. It has borne upward the songs of worshippers here and there, and has left in the hearts of men its tender whisperings of good to come. Catch the soul of the Sabbath and you will find that its name is Love. It is the Gospel alive wooing the hearts of men—the risen Christ with healing in His wings.

Can the Sabbath be measured as you would a field? Then the prairie Sabbath is bigger than any other on earth. In older countries, where people are many and the godly few, the Sabbath seems to fall in patches only, and all between is week-day world; but on the prairie with so much of untouched nature—sky-girt vision, parks, flowers, and expanses of green—the great, solemn Sabbath quiet is like a unanimous vote of loyalty to Heaven.

"Monday again, Janet," said Mr. West, "but one is not given to the blues in this kind of weather so much as in winter. What a morning this is! I have been out to see the pony, and I declare I felt it hard to come



into the house again. Had I been another kind of being than a burly-headed package of flesh and blood I might have taken my breakfast off those brier bushes, yon glancing lake, and the bonnie-green of Mr. Walker's wheat fields. The lark had its note, too, and the plover chirooed down by the water-side. Yes, it was Adam in the garden again—just for a little while. But how is it, can you tell me, that man always falls to eating things instead of only looking at them? How is it that he cannot hear the drum of the pheasant but he must shoot the bird, and have it into the pot? Cannibals we must be till the Lord makes us something better. Let's ask a blessing on the meat, and at it once more."

"Try a bit of this ham, Norman. The chosen shunned the pork, but I think it will suit *you* better than the scent of roses and the whistle of plovers. I am glad that you are taking to the meat so well. You need to brace up for Presbytery on Wednesday, do you see?"

"Oh, yes, Janet; the vows are upon me, and I must attend meetings of Presbytery."

"There's more than vows upon you, Norman. You are for a round with the brethren, as you call them. Talk about women! They are not in it when preachers get together. I've heard you at it, and am astonished at what can come from men who wear pulpit faces, long, like their coat-tails. And you are not at the foot, Norman, my man. I'll be hearing your note among them all the time that you are away; so, mind yourself, and keep your nonsense in moderation. Better not let the lads get the better of you, though.

Jesting seems foolishlest when one gets the worst of it."

Mr. West's religion, as already mentioned, was not that very solemn kind which is often but the fog of physical and spiritual indigestion. He did not put all smiles away into some owl coop of the world. His was a faith of the Gospel as well as of the law: and he saw no virtue in the habitual long face. Meetings of Presbytery were like boy's holidays to him, and he longed for them more than he expressed. His wife read his mind like a book, and often laid his thoughts bare in a fashion which he keenly relished, and which deepened his regard for woman's insight.

Tuesday afternoon saw him astir to catch the evening train for the east. Fifty miles by train and twenty over the prairie would set him down at the Indian School in the Valley where the meeting was to be held.

"Four o'clock, train at six," remarked he, "and I'll have to be off. Two days in council, and home again for three months."

"Oh, yes," replied Janet; "you are on tip-toe, I see. I've seen the day when a meeting of Presbytery would have been at the wry side of your mouth, and something else at the other—I'll not say what! But time brings in queer changes; and if you can find sweetness among such dry bones I'll not be the one to deny you the pleasure. You will think more of your home when you get back to it, I expect."

"Ho, ho, here you are!" said he to one and another as he entered the railway carriage. "How *are* you, and how *are you?*" went the round of eight or nine fellow-labourers, and the salutations were so hearty

that they went up from the tips of his fingers, and loosened his tongue quite beyond the limit set by his wife. The boy within was dancing the wrinkles out of his face, the grey off his head, and age out of his bones. Then he remembered, but he did not need to ; for youth in age blesses the world more than youth in youth. The young cannot help being young, but only a few of the old can be young, and their sprightliness doeth good like a medicine.

"Tickets, please!" 'Tis the man in blue coat and brass buttons who calls to attention. His quick eye catches any who have entered since his last round, and when he looks at Mr. West's ticket he remarks: "More half-fares, eh? What has Old Nick been up to now, that so many of you gentlemen are abroad?"

"We're going to Presbytery," replied Mr. West.

"Presbytery," said he; "what is that?"

Mr. West was about to explain, when the ticket man checked him: "Never mind, sir. We'll let you pass this time; I see that you are all facing the East like good Churchmen anyway."

"How about the coming back, sir?" But he was off to attend to another passenger.

Other brethren stepped in on the way along; and at sunset they reached the end of their railway journey. Now for the spin over the prairie! Midnight will cover them ere they reach the end of their journey. But morning will open her eyes on one of the loveliest valleys in the West—the Qu'Appelle.

Twenty miles of darkness lie between the railway and the hill-top. When these are hung up on the walls

of the mind they will surely make a dense enough background for the valley to exhibit itself on in the morning. But a railway station such as we are at now! Who ever heard of poetry there? Have undying respect for that man when you find him. Of all the unromantic spots on earth this is the king. Good enough for shipping wheat, but the weight of dollar-and-cent earthiness seems to have dumped itself in one spot, and the two-and-two-make-four of condensed prose reigns supreme.

It may be that the stepping on to the platform of twelve or fourteen clergymen did not appreciably lessen the prosiness, but it was a little unusual, and it may be just as well to have a prose beginning to what may be prosier still.

The sun had set, and sweetly too; but no one noticed—no time for that. To be off over the shadowy prairie is the moving thought. "Ho for the valley!" and now away to talk Church, new theology, and what not.

Daylight calls everything by its true name; but moonlight miscalls and misshapes the whole plain. It tells of ghosts and Indians; and the bluffs in their deepest shades brew weirdness enough for dime novels by the score. Now and then the wheel strikes a boulder which believes in the sovereignty of first possession, and the little nod which had almost become a nap is jogged out into the night. The prose shifts ground, but is prose still—prose all those twenty miles, except for those who can conjure with distortions, and make hobgoblins dance on the stage.

Hurl, hurl, on to midnight and the top of the hill;

and then: "Change cars for the valley below"—that is: "Get out and walk to the bottom, every one of you."

As Mr. West stood there among the others looking over the broad, dark, sleeping valley, he began to talk with himself in a way quite peculiar: "Well, well, the bluffs had their ghosts, but this must be their headquarters. What lies down there who can tell? Certainly it looks like Beelzebub's camp. The goblins are getting thicker and bigger—uncivil agents of the Prince of Darkness—great, black officials which turn the wee scamps of the bluffs into mere scouts—into little foraging devils sent forth to steal for their master's palace.

"And that far-away swell of mystery—do you hear it?" And then he, as it were, set his ear to Creation's telephone, and heard the deep, mist-covered valley turn the song of the lake and purling river into a dirge—a spirit-wail of all the tragedies since Eden. It was the undertone of a world's sadness swelling away to the Judgment Seat, and bidding forth tears from the hearts of the living.

Only now and then is this note heard, and it needs the moan of a great gulf at midnight to touch the buried chord. That man does not go unblest who, at least once in his life, has heard the weird music. It will solemnize his soul, and make his work more earnest. Gethsemane and darkness! have not thy blood-drops turned the wail of death into a song of life?

"Oh, well," cried Mr. West, "goblins or no goblins, here goes," and all began to feel their way to the valley below.

"Better not to know," said he. "Plenty of ghosts if we stand looking for them. Tame enough, no doubt, when we get among them. Who knows but morning will turn the biggest, blackest scamps of them all into singing birds and hazel-glens? Devils cannot bear the light, and when we get them out of ourselves there will not be so many in the world. A grand place this for running them over the bank into the lake, eh?"

"Is there a lake down there?" asked Mr. Mickle, one of the number. "It is more like a bottomless pit just now."

"All the better for the purp——" sang out Mr. West. He was going to say more, but his foot caught a snag, and away he went rolling like a log down a grassy slope into a clump of brier bushes.

"Quite dramatic you are," ventured a Mr. Bell, as he gave Mr. West a helping hand back to the beaten trail.

"Eloquent as well as dramatic," said another. "That speech might have been famous had it not been cut short."

"Tuts, tuts," replied Mr. West. "My wife told me not to be foolish. Eloquence has always a *roll* with it, you know. Come away, let's try again. It will take all the Scotch in the crowd to keep from going too fast down this steep place."

Down into the valley below, two or three hundred feet, into the rigs again, across the bridge, and they pull up at the place of meeting. Another move, and blankets cover them as well as the night. There they sleep "till peep o' day," as soundly as twenty miles of night air and goblins will allow.

'Tis the last of June now, and the days have not yet shrivelled into the old age of summer. At three o'clock the goblins flee away, and the birds clear their pipes for another song. The dew has not yet lifted from caressing the grass, the flower, and the tree. All Nature sparkles with eyes that soften, as when the word has been spoken and the answer given. This is the sweet farewell at the gate of day. Fie on you, hazel bush and drooping willow. Fie on you red rose and hanging blue-bell. You have lingered too long at the wooing. You should have said ere this: "Let me go, for the day breaketh." Fie on you all. Yes, fie with the lip, but a great gladness in the heart; for this is holy and thrilling, as when faith gives place to sight.

Did members of Presbytery see all this? Some of them did. Mr. West had made a secret resolve that with the aid of a sleepless Providence he would see the valley in its morning attire. This resolution had been stowed away in some corner of his soul, with strict orders to get itself astir at three o'clock—which it promptly did, and took its master with,

"Come, now," said he to the sleepers around him. "Dustral, Bell, Mikle, Simon, Hawick; up with you. You have been snoring Latin and Greek long enough. Up with you, and let us have the roll in plain English."

A few minutes later and Mr. West was out in the grey morning, seeking a vantage point to take in the scene. "Whoop!" said he, "what is this we begin with?" Some of the hills as he walked along curved themselves into the shape of a great man lying on his back with head far up the valley banks.

"I do declare," said he, "here is one of the giants

asleep-yet! Drunk, too, I believe—or dead; is he? See the thick bluff up there—that is the hair of his head, the two side ones his whiskers, and the little one below the nose his moustache. I'll take up that left leg of his, and perch on yon shaven chin. Just the thing, eh? Dead Cæsar will hold up the camera till the picture is taken."

There he sat, alone, absorbed, and silent, as one should always be when God speaks. From one point to another he slowly turned his eye, while Nature with her own matchless skill painted herself on the canvas which the journey of the night had prepared. It was no snapshot this; for the eye lingered and lingered till even the fine lines were traced and fixed as part of the man himself.

Out before him lay the still, polished lake, like a broad pane of glass puttied in by the hills above and their reflection below. The leaping jack-fish, the gliding swan, the wooded glen, the grassy slope, the winding stream, and graceful willow; all, and more, had themselves painted on the canvas of a soul that God had given eyes to see with and sense to open at the right time. He beheld, too, what the birds saw at the gate of day—the parting kiss of the wooing; and the picture warmed and shone with the light of Love. The Artist made it a thing of earth; then the dews of the morning breathed into it the breath of life, and it became a living soul—or, at least, part of the soul's adorning, to be hung up on the walls of memory.

"This is enough," he cried, clapping the lid on the lens, as it were; then off, stumping down the hill to the lake shore. The breakfast bell was ringing over



the valley from side to side, and he saw other members of Presbytery making their way to the large and comfortable building occupied by the Principal and his staff.

"Where the carcass is the eagles gather," shouted he to one running down the slope to meet him on the trail. "The breakfast bell brings them all, Mr. Simon. We had a feast already, don't you think? Maybe a dash after carnal things will be quite in order now? My inner consciousness bears testimony to the fitness of the arrangement, I can assure you."

Breakfast over, the school bell rang for business; and then it could be easily seen that the main object of the gathering had pressed out of mind the holiday lightness, and was clothing the brethren with becoming dignity and grace. The boy was giving place to the man, and the picnic idea to that of ways and means, whereby the genesis of the West could be properly written. The bell rang as by order of a previous meeting, and every man took his seat, feeling that he was individually responsible for some part of the world's redemption.

A new atmosphere came in with the opening prayer, and the sermon quickened into life the thought of the grandeur of missionary labour. Members rose to the consciousness of co-workers with God, and, being pioneers, could not but do business with the vision of prophets. Some of them had the judgment of ten or twelve years' experience, and saved the court from the apprentice work of beginners. Dr. Zorra, the superintendent, was himself a great balance-wheel, helping the moderator to turn out a well-ground, orthodox,

Presbyterian grist. When *doctrines* become a *doctor*, discussion is unnecessary.

Little need that we detail the business. Interest was maintained at a glowing pitch for two days. Even the figures had a spirit which, wrapped up along with the minutes, may yet quicken some dead man who chances on their bones.

Homeward-bound is now the stir. As men of purpose they renew their vows, and are too eager for the field again to indulge in much show of farewell. The grip of hand told the fibre of soul, and each eye saw in the other the mystic kinship of the one family. "Thine till death," was the unspoken word which each resolved to make audible and visible by work. Thus ended one meeting of Presbytery.

It was at the close of the day, when the badgers take their survey of the outer world, that Mr. West, on his way home from the railway station, talked to Billy about a few straggling things which had not been shelved along with the last two days' proceedings. He had carried away a quite orderly digest of what had been said and done at the business meeting, but there were a few ungathered fragments which his thinking foot tripped over, and he gave the pony's ear the benefit of his remarks thereon.

"Well, my lad," he began, "we had a grand time, I'll say that. But there are a few things which your mistress need not know. Women don't need to know everything. I was swaggering and blustering about Beelzebub, but she doesn't need to know that. I was juggling with Scripture, and keen on racing the goblins over the steep place; but what is that to her? Yes,

the Lord gave me a swing of my own medicine when he rolled me into the briar bushes. I rather suspect that I needed a scratching, and I got it. The brethren, too, poked my sides in fine style. And yon sappy screed about the birds and the dew: wouldn't your mistress snap me up quickly on that? Indeed she would! But hear me! She doesn't need to know, and if you continue a horse instead of an ass you will not mention what I have said to you. Do you hear me?

"Three miles more, and home again." But even at that distance his own house was clearly in sight, and he began to feel the rising pulse which told that there was more real life for him in that humble dwelling than in all the world besides. The outing was good, and the cheery fellowship of the brethren very sweet; but only home could touch the deepest chords. When away, he felt as if tethered by an elastic string which, at the close of duty, brought him surely and speedily back to where his heart was. With the sight of home, the eye softened into the tenderness of other days; and he well knew that if he could see the loved spot three miles away there was one over there who could see equally far.

"Yes, yonder it is! The signal is up! Do you catch it, Billy? Don't you see the reek curling thicker and faster from the chimney? Well, that is the signal, lad! The Martha reel is getting the kettle on, and that is something for me if not for you. Tie the tea-kettle to a dog's tail for a rumbly boy; but, for a hungry man, let it sing over his own fire.

"Men may come and men may go, but happy is the man who has a home to go to! Yon is mine; yes,

mine! I see the wing of the Covenant over it, and like a weary bird I'm glad because of its promised shelter and rest. Say what we will, home is the mother of nobleness—the nerve of the gentleness which makes humanity great.”

“Here you are,” cried Janet, as he drew up at the door. “Bad pennies are always turning up.” But the glint in her eye had gold in it, and seemed to say that her man was only a bad penny because he was a good sovereign. She was not the woman to demand a declaration of love thrée times a day. Far from it; he knew, and she knew, and it would have belittled either to say “I love you,” as the novels do it. There were a tidy house, bright hearth, dainty food, mutual helpfulness day by day; and these said on the subject all that was needed.

“Yes, Janet, I'm here, and maybe it is well that bad pennies get back to where they belong. The kettle is on, I'm sure, and when Billy is disposed of the evening will be our own.”

Blessings on those cups of tea, where husband and wife, they two and no more, run over the chit-chat which goes not from under roof, and would not matter if it did—the seemingly useless chatter which weaves a golden thread into the home-life, and through it into the nation. It is not the public hurrahs which make history; these are but the harvests of words spoken in home corners by fathers and mothers. A tree grows according to its roots, and a nation as the covert life of its homes. But it is not lecturing that we are at; it is Mr. and Mrs. West's table.

“You will be telling me what a grand time you

have had, Norman—as if the sun never shone on that little window of mine there. If you were fed on Presbyteries even three days in the week, I'm thinking that your face would not be so fresh as it is for ordinary. Once I had a taste of your Mr. Moderators, your remits, standing committees, and your statistics, and there has been sand in my teeth ever since. I believe in Home Missions at home. What wonder that the rising generation are run-abouts, when fathers of Presbytery seek their tit-bits abroad?"

"Easy now, Janet. It is not the fullest kettle, but the frothiest that runs over. Old wives conclaves and Presbyteries are alike dry, one to you, the other to me; but tea answereth all things. You are just rubbing me up to get the more out of me in the end. Well, in truth, we had a grand time. I feel like running over without much pumping, but between you and the tea-pot there will not likely be much left unsaid."

He was right; that night all the ins and outs of Presbytery passed under review. No question is properly discussed till woman's voice is heard, and perhaps the laws of our land would be better up to the mark if they were both masculine and feminine.

"You are getting the sand out of your teeth at last, Janet," said he. "You are fairly devouring even remits and statistics. Come now, admit that Presbyteries are not so dry after all."

"Well, maybe not, Norman. When they are held at home, with the tea-pot for moderator, there is something in them. The revised version is, no doubt, a great improvement on the first. Did you hear that our friend Mr. Drayton is ill? It is thought that he will not recover."

"As bad as that?" said he. "He has never been well since I knew him, but I did not hear that he was worse. He is not now in my field; but I must go and see him to-morrow. Among the godly in the West he is one of them. I must hear what this son of the King has to say before he leaves us."

## CHAPTER IX.

### A DEATH-BED.

TRUE to his intention, Mr. West took the road to Mr. Drayton's house in the morning. It was not the early morning, for he had laid out to arrive at the end of the fifteen-mile drive about two o'clock, and thus leave time to return home before dark.

June calls for songs, but this day threatens rain, and his thoughts are more inclined to run to the end of life than chime in with the hey-day of summer. The errand he was on, and, somehow, the presentiment that his friend was nearing the river, captured the attention and held him to sober musings. He saw Nature as if he saw not, heard as if he heard not, and what he did see and hear added to his feelings a note of sadness and mourning. The birds and the winds, the trees and all things around, seemed to be holding themselves in suspense of prayer that one true as Nature to Nature's God should not be taken from them.

If the dew and the air and the light run in sympathy to kiss the wounded daisy, has not Nature some way of putting tender spirit-hands under the burden of human pain? Why are flowers taken into the sick-room? Is it not that they may give their own fragrant

pity to the sufferer? Have the flowers hearts? Surely they could not turn red as the rose and then white as the lily if there were no pulse within? Flowers may be only the embroidery of God's garment, but surely no part can be without its soul when He dwells in all. The transfigured Christ shone through his raiment; and has not the June glory of the prairie in it the promise of a transfigured earth and a transfigured humanity. We are linked to Nature, body and soul, More, we are all Nature culminated in man, and when one member suffers shall not the whole body suffer with it? There are longer nerves in a true man than those that reach his finger-tips: they run out through the entire living body of Creation, and find their health and blessedness in Nature's God.

But this day, as we have said, is dark and cloudy. It has the leaden hue of sorrow in its wing. Why this in a world where God dwells—the mystery of the cloud which drapes the sky, hushes the birds' song, and shadows the hearts of men? Is this the riddle which we must all puzzle over ere we know the meaning of noon-tide darkness? Is there no bright angel without a dark one hovering near? Such were some of the missionary's musings as he left mile after mile of the trail behind.

"Yes, yes," he cried, as he rounded a green bluff, "there they are! Whoa, Billy; I must have some of those beauties for Mr. Drayton." So out he sprang to the prairie sod, and soon had in hand a large bunch of roses, tiger lilies, blue-bells, and that. The stems of these he tied together with long prairie grass, and set them carefully up in one corner of the seat.



"This may seem girlish," thought he, "but never mind; the Bible will be on the table as well as the doctor's stuff, and it will not fall out with the flowers if it does with the physic. I often think that the Bible looks upon drug-bottles as very poor company."

Twelve o'clock came, and Billy, who knew the district well, began to turn off to the settlers' houses, thus reminding his master that a drink of water and a feed of oats would not be amiss.

"Oh, yes, I understand," said Mr. West; "but we'll go on to Mr. Sandy's. We have never fared badly there yet, have we?"

"How do you do, Mr. West?" said Mr. Sandy, as the missionary drew rein at the door. "Glad to see you. You are not our way so often as you used to be."

"No, I am not. This filling-in of the country is changing our mission-fields; but I am not forgetting. No, no! It seems like home to be back again."

"We are not forgetting either, Mr. West; come away in. We are just sitting down to dinner, but John will look after the pony. You are going to see Mr. Drayton, I expect? He is very ill they tell me. I saw the doctor yesterday, and he says that very little can be done for him. His body is worn out struggling against that asthma which he has had all his life. His heart is giving way, and he may not last long."

"Just as I expected, Mr. Sandy. He has been a most wonderful man. All the time that I have known him he has been doing the work of two men, with half the strength of one. The heart of his body may fail, but I am sure the other never will. It has too firm a grip of the throne for that. His sufferings have

softened and mellowed him into more soul than body. When the spirit wings its way up yonder there will not be much clay left behind. I'd rather be poor, wasted Mr. Drayton than the biggest king of Europe. There's a crown waiting for him, and it is a beauty. I'll be glad of a word with him before he leaves for his Father's house."

"I don't bank on such things as you do, Mr. West ; but I believe in Mr. Drayton's religion. I can at least pray this prayer : ' Let my latter end be like his.' Trust me ; I would be willing to quarrel with any man who felt otherwise."

"Not many would pray for a life of pain like his has been, Mr. Sandy ; but better is the end than the beginning, or the middle either, and all's well that *ends* well. We don't know suffering at all as compared with his ; and yet it is doubtful if we are writing life's story as well as he has done. But I am forgetting. I will have to take the road at once. I see the lad bringing my pony."

It was Mr. Drayton's brother who stood in the doorway as Mr. West tied his pony to the post before entering. Truly a brother's face it was ; a face of prayer, with submission coming slowly to the rescue.

"He will be revived by your coming, Mr. West. He expressed a desire to see you to-day when our own minister was in. I am hoping for the best, but my brother has neither hope nor desire to remain longer. We have not been allowing many to see him, but your presence—and that of his own minister, who is coming now—will do him good."

"How is that, Mr. Drayton ?" said the missionary,

as he lifted the flowers from the seat and held them up in the air. "Will you give me a little water in a glass? I am going to take them into the room with me—they will be a sort of natural introduction, do you see. Flowers are frail things, to be sure, but to a man who is leaving this world they may be just as substantial as the great mountains, and maybe more like the country to which he is going."

Sure enough the flowers were an introduction. As he entered the room the frail sufferer was sleeping the sleep of weakness; but from the face there shone upon this dim world a light which said: "Whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell."

"Another transfiguration," thought Mr. West, and into his eyes there came the dread of a holy place. On tip-toe, with bated breath, he stole over to the table and set the flowers beside the Bible. The water had revived them, and spirit wings seemed to be wafting their fragrance about the room. The lips of the sleeper had no word, but the eyes opened now and then as the soul swept and re-swept over the face in ecstasy of sights and sounds which were luring him away from this world. The little prairie breeze of the missionary and the flowers, circling around his pillow for a moment, brought him back to earth—but not to the fogs and lowlands. He is never to be there again. It was back to the mount of glory only for a last look on those that remain, and then away, like Elias, without tasting of death.

A rare, kindly smile stole over the face as he saw his old friends standing by, but he uttered no word. Yet, what things were said by those eyes! Like pity-

ing saviours they yearned out upon human sorrow, and opened a new spring of tenderness in the breasts of the living, who stood overpowered and strangely conscious of the presence of unseen ones. The poor speech of earth had lost its cunning, for the angels of the dreamer's dreams had descended with him to await the farewells and glorify the place into a very House of God. The room pulsed with Heaven, and the few friends stood there in the eloquence of silence. The light, too, was as the shining spirits who had come from above and were waiting to return. Even now they are on the wing, and with them the four souls in that upper room—three of them to come back, the other to go on.

Is the silence broken? Do we hear the returning murmur of a world that had held its breath for a little? Do we listen to the blue sending back its word: "Hear Him." The three friends heard it with ears that can never forget, and the world is once more, to them, the field of stern duty.

How vulgar is this Vanity Fair earth to one who has just come back from a turn within the veil. It roars like an ill-mannered, brainless loon. The Spirit-filled man sees in it but the husks of souls, and hies him away to unsullied Nature for relief.

Mr. West felt the truth of this after the speaking air of that upper room. When all was over, he still felt silence to be golden, and hurried away from the haunts of men. Not till he had reached the spot where he had plucked the flowers did he awaken from his dream. There a lark sent up its note and loosened the spell which had bound him.

He mused over this, and wondered why the lark sang now when it could only chuck and chirp in the morning? "Had it, too, soared skyward as the prize from earth was borne home? Had the joy of the redeemed sent them thronging through the gates, scattering the clouds of earth, and telling even the birds that a great victory had been won? Held back all day long, had the feathered choir counted this evening sunshine but a belated morning and, bound to regain lost time, were they giving forth a double measure of their joy?" The missionary had caught in all this a little of Covenant meaning, and, ere he knew, had broken silence by trying to repeat a few notes of the lark's song.

"What!" cried he, as it were catching his tongue, "singing already! I might put on a show of decency, anyway. I went to say good-bye to the son of a King. Did I speak at all? Not a word that I can remember. Nor he to me. Strange! Yet, why speak? Children should be still when great ones are near. They were there in that room sure enough; looking through those wondrous eyes of his, and robing our souls with light, till this poor tabernacle of clay was ashamed of itself. What could I do but hold my breath even to the limit of life, and then let it away softly lest the spirits should be offended. No, I'll never be so much out of the body again till the Lord calls me hence. And may the lark follow a little way, and sing back to earth that very song that it sang on the willow tree. But I have a message too: Hear *it*? No. Hear *Him*. Keep on my little friend with the heart outside your breast, sing away at your glad song and I'll go tell of the grace that bringeth Salvation.

"Come away, Billy! Out of that funeral pace, or we'll be too late to catch the signal. Who knows but the kettle has been singing to your mistress the same song that the lark has been singing to me? No accounting for the ways that the other world speaks to this.

"Did you ever see a sunset like yon, my lad?—and the rainbow behind us, too. Surely it could not be very unfeeling for the lark to sing or your master either when the skies are putting on such a broad smile? We read of joy coming in the morning, but I think it better to come in the evening, for we say again: 'Better is the end of a thing than the beginning.'

"Why wail at a Christian's death? Why not weep when he is converted? If his conversion is genuine, he is dead, buried and risen with Christ, and when he dies, as we call it, he but goes to where he has been all along by faith. If the dying has not been done before death, there will be weeping enough. Mr. Drayton would weep for us, but has no need of our tears for him. If we could see him as he is, ~~we~~ we would sing. Yes, the lark's song is nearer right than the mourner's dirge."

## CHAPTER X.

### AUTUMN.

TIME flies, and September is with us. The prairie grass is beginning to set on Mr. Drayton's grave, and the days having rounded in from the outward journey are shrinking before the black march of winter nights. The binder has clicked off the last sheaf of the season, and the hum of the threshing machine chimes in with the song of harvest-home.

"Janet," said he, "don't you think that the year has come to just about where we are in life? It has a few fag-ends to gather up, and then winter. We've had a bonnie springtime, a fine summer, and now a grand harvest. It takes the shiver out of the north wind to see the stooks wherever I go. Our Father is very good to us. When Thanksgiving Day comes I'll sing just as loudly as my lungs will let me."

"You sing, Norman! I've known you for the last forty years, and never yet have heard from you anything that could be called singing. You were telling me how the lark set you on one day, and I have no doubt but that was as near as you ever came to singing; yet I was not there, and cannot say what it was like. We'll suppose, however, that you did, once in your life, sing like a lark when nobody heard you.

"And talk about fag-ends! I wonder at you there, too, Norman. There are no fag-ends in life. If we give out five loaves we take in twelve baskets, and so have more at the end than at the beginning. There need be no winter to the man who keeps his under lip from slip-slipping away down, as if he wanted to go to the grave before the time. That thanksgiving song will be worth hearing, though. You may roar like Niagara for me. Will it be at the service? I'll be sorry for the people; but Cruikshanks will keep the tune, even if you burst like a volcano. The Lord will have respect to your good intentions, and will, no doubt, let you pass without public censure; so just roar if you feel like it—there is a good reason."

"You have plenty of pepper with your salt, Janet, but it is easy to bear the nip when the meat is so savoury. I have a high respect for authority, good wife, and I thank you for permission to roar on Thanksgiving Day. You may depend on me doing my duty. *You* sing like a mavis, I admit, and surely the Millennium is drawing near when a volcano and a mavis are so happily mated as to nest it out here on the prairie."

"Ho, ho, Norman; that's fine—Niagara, volcano, pepper, salt, and now sugar! No lack of variety in our house, is there? When is the new church to be opened? Mrs. Perth was in yesterday, and she says the young people are in high glee over it—they want a social, do you see? I know that you look on such things as kind of necessary nothings; but maybe we'll see you as blithe as any of them when the fray is on."

"Well, wife, I've seen the day when I could get on



tip-toe with the best of them ; especially if a certain lass was to be there. I don't think that I have ever rued my foolishness, so we'll have the social, and ask no questions. Maybe the long faces of age are no more pleasing to Him than the young ones that giggle and make sheep's eyes at one another."

Another Sabbath morning greets the prairie. It is a pensive morning, with the dream of Indian summer in its eye. The bluffs are finished bouquets of red, yellow, and green, and gathered sheaves tell of Nature's work done for the season. As the mother dreams when the boys and girls have gone away to set up for themselves, so is the dream of autumn. The gathered memories of the year brew a touch of sadness. The bluffs dream, the fields dream, the skies dream, and the still air is laden with tender whisperings of the past.

On his way home for the evening service he thought of the shack which he had visited on that cold winter day. He had not seen the young men for some time ; they had promised to attend service, but had not done so, and he wondered how they could so easily say and do not.

"I'll know the reason some day," said he to himself, as a flash of fight rose to his face. "By the Lord's help, they will go down on their knees once more—I'll see to that."

The words had just passed his lips when, as if in acceptance of the challenge, the sharp report of a gun broke upon the Sabbath stillness. Billy pricked up his ears, and would have made at least half a mile in double-quick time, but his master said : "No ! No, my lad, we'll not run away. The Sabbath-breaker is not

going to escape as if he were lord of this earth." With this he drew rein from the trail in the direction of a small cloud of smoke rising from the back of a bluff not a quarter of a mile away.

Turned, he roared at Billy. "Run, would you? Run now if you will, but never turn tail to the foe as long as I am your master. You are fond of calling me Balaam; well, I'll be Jehu this time, so get on." With a swish of the whip in the air he roared again: "Get on, I tell you," and Billy was off at anything but a Sabbath-day speed.

Behind the bluff in question stood a young man with gun in one hand and jack-rabbit in the other, listening and wondering what whirling thing the report of his gun had brought off the trail. Three or four dogs frolicked around him, glad that game had been taken, yet so interested were they in the fact that they did not notice the missionary's approach. However, when the buckboard came tearing round the side of a bluff away they went in proper dog style, while their loud antics over one another and round about the rig were splendidly in keeping with the driving of this Sabbath-observance Jehu.

Billy had not had time for his second wind, and when his master drew rein where the young man was standing, his sides went out and in like a bellows. The hot, swift breath seemed to say between the spouts of steam: "I'd rather be an ass—a . . . under a Balaam—a . . . than a horse before a Jehu, anyway."

"It's the parson, I do declare," muttered the young man to himself; but he stood too much astonished to

do anything but stare. He tried to set up a bold front, but the starching was not an entire success. *Caught* was written all over him, and he felt relieved only when Mr. West helped him to say good-day by saying it first.

"You seem to be on your mettle, parson," he said, with an air of fixed-up composure.

"Oh, you know me," said the missionary.

"You bet I do, sir. Over at the shack last winter, you remember. My name is Long, but I'm blest if I wanted to see you just now."

"I'm not a highwayman, Mr. Long, nor a N.W.M.P., as you know. Why do you not want to see me? Is that rabbit getting too heavy for you? Better lay it down for a little; the gun, too—you will feel more comfortable, I think."

This young Long did, not only without demur or comment, but with the ready action of one who knew at least how to obey the man before him.

When a bullet strikes and penetrates a target it has to force its way through, but when a second one hits the same place it meets with little resistance. When visiting the shack Mr. West captured the will of young Long, who could not now, for the life of him, do otherwise than obey the voice of his king. The righteousness of the thing, too, commended itself, and so, gun and game went down on the grass with ready loyalty. The dogs, too, gulped their spittle and stretched their chins along the ground toward the rabbit and the gun.

Mr. West also stepped from the rig, and taking Mr. Long by the hand, said in firm, fatherly tone:

"Young man, I am glad to see that you have a con-

science. How would it suit to drop on our knees and ask the Lord about this?"

"All right," said he, with a rising note of expectant pleasure. He had never before that day in the shack had the subduing sense of religion as a reality, and little memories had often brought the wish that such experience would return. Indeed, he had more than once sought after it by trying to pray himself. Now it was upon him again in full force, and he felt no desire to have it otherwise than it was at that moment. The knees went down. Even the dogs were reverent. And as the missionary asked that the young man's eyes be opened, all the wild uproar was far away, and Sabbath was Sabbath once more.

When on their feet again, Mr. West took the young man's hand, and holding it for a little, said tenderly:

"My good friend, He has blessed us both. Now be true to your convictions and you will come out all right." With that he mounted his buckboard to be off, but, drawing rein suddenly, he said: "Oh, I am forgetting your partner! How is he?"

"Sure! Jim, you mean? He is not with me now. You hit him harder that day than you did me. He moped about all spring, and now he is off to Manitoba College. Shouldn't wonder if he turn out parson yet."

"That's news, Mr. Long, and not bad news either. I'll get particulars from you some other day. Good-bye just now."

Summer and winter were having their first tussle when the arrangements for the church-opening were nearly completed. The day appointed was the 10th of November. Thursday would be Thanksgiving Day,

and the social was to be held in the evening, so both gatherings would be of a thanksgiving nature.

"Janet, where are you? He is coming; read that!" He had just returned from the post-office, and a letter stated that the Superintendent was now on his autumn rounds, and could arrange to be at the church opening to conduct the services.

"Good, Norman! It will be quite an event to have the 'Bishop' with us for a day or two."

"Tuts, woman. I wonder at you. None of your Episcopalian nonsense in this house."

"Well, Norman, there *are* bishops in the world. After you have said all, there are bishops still. But I expect that they are something like kings—born, not made. He is a long man, the doctor—long in body, long in his love for the Master, long in the work, and long in the Presbyterian Church. I verily believe that if he had John Knox back again he would be willing to slip him into the Pope's chair, and then rub his hands as if a long-delayed vision had arrived. I'll not say that he is far wrong in this either, for Knox would make a grand Pope, as man's notions go, but my opinion is that women should rule the world.' Indeed, I think they do, whether men believe it or not.

"Who was it that wrote about the 'Greatest thing in the World'—Love? We never rule till we have that, and maybe the world would be lean enough in this if there were no women. Men are never great till they become women in this respect. They rule best who know not that they rule; and they obey best who know not that they obey. Men and women are little good after they know that they are rulers.

"A woman, they tell me, broke the Apostolic Succession; but I rather think that it was not broken at all. That little oddity of history was only the real bond and divinity of the chain kinked up into the light for an airing—what was and is all the time without being seen! Men *seem* to rule: women *do*. They *love*, and the rest comes of itself. Love? Yes, the lip falters in the saying of it. Like the Sacred Name, it sounds best after fasting and prayer. With more of it, the word would not be thrown about like a baby's toy as it is. You may rule, Norman, and so may I; but I hope neither of us will ever know it. Somehow I think that home would not be home if we did."

"You have quite surpassed yourself, Janet. It is you who should take the pulpit. Better not say much about this, though, lest our eyes be opened. A sweet day-dream makes easy labour. Dearie me! The Pope is a woman, then—named Janet, maybe. That's news to me. For the last forty years I have been a papist and knew it not. I'll see to it that I give more heed to the Apostolic Succession after this. A round by the new church to-morrow will give me more time to think over what you have said."

"You are there most of your time just now, Norman. But if you are needed you can be spared here."

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE PHILISTINE.

NOVEMBER blasts drive summer from the prairie. They sweep the plain with a tearing, angry rush, as if Dame Nature were doting too long over her latest children. "Be off with you!" they seem to say; "if you had your way I would not get a whirl at the snow-drifts all the year round. Off you go, and bide your time—business, you know."

It was so this morning as Mr. West hurried on toward the new church. The more-than-half winter blast hissed and raged in his ear, and battered his face with little round heralds of December snow. Musing and straight-thinking were quite out of the question. The thorn on the flesh, if not *in* it, sent his mental economy into fits and jerks like a crazy windmill; but the grist was of no use. Rasped into nothingness, the situation seemed to demand flight or fight, and not being built for flying, he inclined to the side of fight.

"Oh that the winds were Goliath, that I might knock him down and be at rest!" he cried. "The bluster is here, but where is the man? Show me the gentleman that is slapping my face." But the winds went howling on, and he could only scold Billy, and

treat him to one of the biggest make-believe thrashings that he had ever received.

"Get on, you sluggard!" he roared above the wind. "Pick up your feet there. Winter coming at forty miles an hour, and no faster than that! Are you dreaming of yon blizzard, and the sod stable where you had the oats? Or is it worn-out you are? Is that it?—just like the old buckboard. I see that the tyres are getting thin, the spokes are wheezing in the hubs, and the wheels ply out and in like the feet of a trotting cow. You are lazy, sir! Out of this, I tell you!" And with another swish of the whip in the air, Billy struck up as sour a donkey canter as his master could wish.

To be sure this flurry was not for exhibition, neither was it seen, but on rounding a bluff, Billy—ears back, all-fours stumping like a jack rabbit, and his master throwing queer names at him behind—ran slash into another rig which was turning in from the other side. Neither driver had seen the other, and the collision was like two express trains meeting on a curve. The damage, however, was slight, seeing that the horses were flesh and blood.

Mr. West was quite ready to apologize for foolish driving, but the other was wrathful, wrathful as the wind among the twisting willows. Had the flat bottle which lay broken on the trail anything to do with his choler? It had snugly nestled in a breast-pocket near the man's heart, but with the shock of collision the naughty thing took to flying, and smashed itself on the iron step of the buggy.

This driver was in no mood for apology, neither was he open to reason of any kind, so he foamed out:



"Get out of the way, you old badger. You and your kind are always blocking the Queen's highway. You expect other people to give the whole road—as if you were away up. But not this time, see, if Tabby (Talbot) Jones knows himself. Back out there! And be thankful that you get off with a whole skin."

"Ho; ho! I have found my Goliath sooner than I expected." Then turning to the man, Mr. West said calmly: "Mr. Jones, is it? Tabby Jones, you say. Well, I don't see that a tabby is much better than a badger, so we'll let that pass. But do you think that either of us is to be blamed for this? As for my occupation, you seem to know it, and (with a side-glance at the broken bottle) perhaps I have an inkling of yours."

"Get off the trail!" roared Jones, in heightening tones. "Come now, you old hypocrite, before I help you! I once heard you from that coward's castle which you call a pulpit, but you daren't say the same things out here. You sent all us fellows down to fire and brimstone, and I make no secret of it, I have been hankering for the worth of my contempt out of your hide ever since. Get out, I tell you! Only for your coat you would go home with a few special hieroglyphics around those eyes of yours. Turn out, I say!"

There were special hieroglyphics in those eyes already. Twirl of pipes and flash of steel; ho, for the Light Brigade!

"Certainly I'll get out, Mr. Jones," and with one bound Mr. West was standing on the prairie a full inch taller than usual. Then, throwing his coat into the buckboard, cap ditto, and smoothing up the slack of his shirt-sleeves right and left, as one making ready for

the fore-hammer, he faced his foe, and began very deliberately :

"Now, Mr. Jones, come away. There's the coat and here's the man. If you have a mortgage on my hide, or special hieroglyphics for my eyes, now is your time. The ponies will make friends with their noses while we try it in another way. I'm feeling the grace of God running down my arms. Come away, sir. The spirit is out of your pocket, sure, but not out of your inside yet. No, no; you are a brave man, Mr. Jones, and I'll not keep you waiting. It is a fine feather that you will be putting in your cap this day. Yes, you will be a great man very soon—a great man, Mr. Jones. Come away."

So the words ran on, and as they ran the Balaclava eyes slang stones at the Philistine's head till it had but one thought of how to get out and away by the opposite side of the buckboard.

"This side, this side, Mr. Jones. Just here is a good place." But another moment and he was off. As he passed Billy he gave him the full weight of his whip, hoping to leave the missionary alone on the prairie. But before the pony had set himself to run away, Mr. West leaped into the rig, seized the reins, and taking a swing round at full gallop, gave chase.

"Good, my lad!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "We'll have the hieroglyphics yet! Pursue him, sir, even to Gath!" and swish went the whip again—on Billy's side this time. But the Philistine promptly did the same, and when we say that a sedate prophet of the West did here, on an old buckboard, pursue the foe like a blizzard, bare-headed, coatless,

and whooping like an Indian, we trust that we have presented a picture sufficiently interesting to merit ordinary appreciation. The coat flies off here, the hat there, the robes at intervals, but on goes the chase—on . . . on . . . along that trail . . . without avail! The nimble-footed younger animal had Mr. Jones triumphantly off to the flat-bottle corner, where he could of an evening tell the other fellows how he had scored the preacher.

Drawing rein, Mr. West gave his mind to Billy: "No use, my lad, the tabby is too fleet for the badger. We will have to pick up our duds and get back to common life. Our old bones will tell us of this tomorrow, I expect, but no use borrowing trouble." Then in an undertone could be heard something about "fleeing when no man pursueth."

That evening he found himself telling Janet the whole exploit of the day. He had made a bargain with the pony not to say anything about it, but the warm fire and the consciousness that he had never kept from his wife matters great or small led him to break his bargain and review the whole affair in detail.

"There you have my confession, Janet, and I'm waiting for mercy at your door."

"Well, Norman, that is not a very nice story, but you have the matter in your own hands. Jones is not likely to tell the story as it was, and nobody else knows but yourself, and one who will keep it if you wish. For my part, I do not think it matters whether it keeps or not. I heard of some of your rounds in that line before I married you, and I'll not say but they helped on the match. Of course, you are a preacher now, and should

put off the young man with his deeds. But if it was as you say, that the 'grace of God' came into your arms, I cannot see what you were to do but use it for the purpose for which it was sent. The man will not likely show up again, unless the grace of God which he did not get bring him to a better mind—we'll look for that. Most people need some kind of a spirit taken out of them before they have room for the Right One."

"Very good, very good," said he. "I'm glad that we are not going to have a divided house over this—certainly, I meant it for his good. The spirit was willing, but Billy's feet were too slow—far too slow."

## CHAPTER XII.

### DOCTOR ZORRA.

THERE are peeps-o'-day in history, permitted only to inspired souls—souls alert to enter into business partnership with Providence—lives which receive their commission while others sleep or, at best, are only half awake. Were there not, years ago, men who could see the dawning of new settlement on these western plains? The tall Indian stalked hither and thither, and dreamed not of a better earthly lot. The wild buffalo grazed, drank at the slough, grazed again, and then pawed the dirt over his back with a roar, in thanksgiving to his stars that he was born a beast and not a man.

Were there men who saw all this from the hill-tops of prophetic vision—men who beheld new dwellings, new firesides, stretches of prairie turned by the plough, mines opened, and humming industries from lake to ocean? Did they see beforehand the larger Canada as the mother of millions? And were there those too, who, a little higher up the mount of vision, saw altars raised to the God of Heaven? Did they hear amid the roar of beginnings the praise of HIM who holds the earth by right of Creation and Purchase?

Yes, we could name many such twice-born seers.

But who was that one who more than thirty years ago climbed higher than the other prophets? He saw from Port Arthur to Victoria, from the forty-ninth parallel to the Arctic Circle; and, as he looked, there burned into his soul the vision of the land that was to be. There he received his life-long commission, and has since that time seen much with the eye that he first saw in vision. Certainly he has seen missionaries following up new settlements, and churches rising in all directions. Who was this prophet? It was Dr. Zorra, the Superintendent of Missions, who is now chatting with Mr. West on the way from the railway station.

He was questioning Mr. West very earnestly regarding his work and his field.

"How are you off for money, Mr. West? The Building Fund is in good condition just now, and a grant or a loan can be had for your church if you require it."

"Very good, doctor; but I think we don't need to apply. The crop of the district has been good for two years, and independence is a means of grace, you know. What is to be your text to-morrow?"

"Well, I was at a church-opening last Sabbath, and spoke of Abram's altar, which he erected on his arrival in Canaan. But there are other texts which I could make suitable, I think. In the afternoon I would like to tell them something about the work in the West, and in the evening I will preach. Have you a text for me?"

"Oh, yes, I can give you a text, but if you have not had it before it would hardly be fair to give it at this late hour."

"Oh, let me have it. A Superintendent's preaching reputation does not need to be very high. He can read his verse, and go where he likes after that. Out with your text."

"How would this do, then? 'A man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, a covert from the tempest.'"

"Couldn't be better, sir! I had it a short time ago, and I think I could preach a week on that subject. It will suit for a dedication service too, for there is nothing easier than to pass from the covering of a man to the covering of a house, or from the covering of a house to that of a man. I will take it to-morrow evening."

"Thank you, doctor. I have a little secret of my own in choosing this text. By taking it you confer a favour which will entitle you to the secret some other day."

"Other people have their secrets too, Mr. West. I have a few of my own which are worth keeping. Yours are not the 'glummy' kind, though. I think you look just as young as when I saw you two years ago. To be sure you are taking to the grey, but you wear it gracefully, and that is something."

"The same to you, doctor. One bit of blarney calls for another. It's our own faults if we snarl up Time and the roaring lion have to resign when old Adam stops trading with the world. Grey hairs do not mean age, they mean youth—the flowering of angelhood, you know."

"Come, come!" remarked the doctor. "Do you often soar like that? A pretty pair of angels we will

make, eh? A long time ere you get your wings yet, Mr. West; and I can't say that I am 'in haste' for mine. No harm having our measures taken, though, and maybe we will have them fitted on sooner than we expect. They will not be needed for the church-opening, anyway, and better stick to plain West and Zorra till we are given better names."

"Oh, well," replied Mr. West, with fine submission, "you are Superintendent, and I will not die till you say so if I can help it."

Those two men knew each other well, and no halo of office could check their play of individuality. They had minds of their own, and could, in Scotch fashion, court each with drawn swords, yet neither wish the other beaten.

There was one at the window, too, watching their coming, who could draw as keen a blade as either of them. Indeed, being a woman, she often found the joint in the harness when scholars thought themselves secure. But she has other iron to polish just now. The Martha step has been on all the time that her husband was away. She saw him off, then fell to her idol; and it would have taken a search-warrant from the Queen's own household to discover a flaw in that little home. Was there not a reason? The doctor was coming, and she would have him know that Presbyterianism and dirt had no manner of kinship.

Mrs. West had long ere this come to know the doctor's worth, and felt it joy to be utterly transparent in his presence. The reserve that kills friendship might go to the Cannibal Islands for her. No mirk of heart here. She was bound to be a mother to him



while he was with them, if she could. And she could. She would send him away doubting if his own mother were dead. And Janet did—at least his mother seemed to him to have returned from the long ago.

With outstretched hand she met him at the door: "Glad to see you, doctor." And, be assured, it was no limp hand that met hers. Dr. Zorra's grips were impressive. He never gave just two fingers; neither did his hand lie like a flab in yours. He was not even content with giving one whole hand: he completely covered yours with both of his, then squeezed, and there were scintillations at those finger-tips for an hour after.

In the evening the two missionaries fell to their hobbies: one to his broad parish, and the other to his patch, which helped to make up the whole. They had talked old fields, new fields, men, and churches for three straight hours, and were beginning the fourth when they were suddenly called to order. It was Mrs. West who came into the room, and asserted herself after this fashion:

"You are a well-matched pair, for sure; and yet you are no pair at all. You have been driving tandem all the evening, like Indians on the home-stretch—you, doctor, first, and Norman at your heels. You have talked shop till my house is straggled all over with boards, and blocks, and shavings, and all manner of chopped-up litter, as if the earth and the fulness thereof were to be turned into churches. I don't see what you will do in Heaven, where there are no sinners to convert nor kirks to build. You are glorious among the sinners. For my part I object to turning this planet into a

church-factory. It has other uses, and you are not going to persuade people out of their common-sense. My wee, winking primrose on the window there has its pot of earth, too, but it does not build a kirk on it—it knows better. And that nodding beauty by its side, that opened its breast just to-day to welcome you, doctor, has surely a sweeter message than a stuffy cathedral. Maybe in fussing about the shop you are forgetting the Man at the Bench."

"Thank you, Mrs. West," responded the doctor. "I am glad that you have put a spirit into our dry sticks. You are right. If churches, built for the worship of God, are not the outcome of certain spiritual facts in the people, they are somewhat meaningless. Built up within, we long to build without. The Athenians marked every new thing in religion by a new altar. David, too, fought his way through a long, stormy experience to the building of the Lord's House; and so also it is natural that the long guess at the riddle of life should labour to give outward expression to its success. We put certain soul victories on record by giving them visibility, and we should never forget the 'Man at the Bench.'"

"Do you know, doctor," began Mrs. West again, "that Norman was chiding me for calling you Bishop? He said that it was unscriptural, Episcopalian, Romish, and what not; but I rather like the name. Some folk throw the mouth at the fiddle because of the 'firds' and 'merriorums' that keep it company, but it holds on for all that. I am sure that other name of yours is not very bonnie! Superintendent always minds me of a wagon with a ton of bricks on its back, lumbering over

the stones—*Sup-er-in-ten-dunt*. Bishop means soft raiment, palaces, carriages, and flunkeys at your pleasure, sir. Superintendent tells of bush-whacking, corduroy roads, surveying, fish, beans, bacon, and cold water. So, with your permission, doctor, we'll have your name changed."

"My good woman," said the doctor, with evident appreciation, "your intentions are good, but would the motion pass the Assembly? I am sure you would not have me wear honours that did not come through a strictly orthodox channel."

"Oh, well, have your own way! Drive on in your lumber-wagon! It is hardly worth while reforming the General Assembly at my time of life. You are ready to retire for the night, I am sure."

Monday evening sees Mr. and Mrs. West sitting again at their own fireside—and Dr. Zorra, you say? Not at all, he is off. By this time he is spinning away toward the Rocky Mountains. He never could see any reason for not being "in haste," when his work was done. Done in one place, he must fly to another. While the church-opening was on he was there, all there, but after the last Amen of the service he was away in thought to the next point of duty. A great restless prayer in the inmost soul of him took command, and he sighed for something even faster than the C.P.R.

Mrs. West had dainty bits to keep him for a week, and could almost wish him sick for the joy of nursing him; but he was not sick, and nothing else could hold him. In her heart, however, she understood, and thought him greater because of hurrying away.

On parting at the door that morning the doctor's good-byes to his hostess were warm and interesting, but she only looked him in the eye, and gave this parting shot :

"I see the map of the North-West in your face, doctor, so, be off with you."

The Sabbath had been fine, and the meetings large. From far and near the people gathered, both morning and evening. At the afternoon service the doctor gave a very full lecture on missions, and the Spirit that came in with the dedication prayer gave to the people glimpses of his own outlook for the West.

When preaching in the evening, the same spirit of vision was manifested as the Spirit of the Gospel. The "man as the hiding-place" was easily understood by the people, for it was the same One who had cheered them on that Communion Sabbath, and had been their companion during the intervening months. As the stamp gives authority for the transmission and delivery of a letter, so the words of the speaker were carried home to the individual heart.

"Well," said Mr. Brown to Mrs. McNab, on the way home that evening, "how did you like him?"

"Sakes, Mr. Broon, ye're askin' me a hard question. I canna for the life o' me tell how I likit him. I was just a' through-ither a' the time that he was speakin'. Whèn he askit the Lord tae come and take the hoose, He cam'. Oh, yes, He cam', for I was off to the Heilans at once. I aye see the Heilans when the Lord's aboot, and I saw them then, fine—Machrihanish, Ballyvain, Bengullion; and me a lassie again, hummin' up and doon the Laggan like a bee amang the heather.

Ay, it was bonnie. But when he cam' tae talk aboot money and mining, lumber-camps, and sic troke, I was whuppit back in a trice, I can tell ye. An' awfu' swoop it was frae bonnie Argyll tae this blaw-weary land o' the Gentiles. I was thinkin' that the Lord wad leave us a'thegither, for, tell the truth, I thocht it neither the time nor place for sic things—no! And I jaloosed that the Lord wad be the same; but He seemed tae bide tae the very end, so He did. Ye wad notice that the doctor keepit weel tae the Psalms., Likely that had something tae do wi't. But, O dearie me, I'll no say how mony times I was ower the water sittin' there. Thi' nicht, though, I took tae Scotland at the beginning, and bided there tae the very end. Indeed, I'm there yet!"

"You talk as if Heaven and the Highlands were the same place, Mrs. McNab."

"Forgive me, Mr. Broon; I canna help it. No; I canna help it. If I were deein' the nicht, it's the Heilans I wad see, and Himsel' comin' ower the hills tae tak' me Hame."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THANKSGIVING.

THANKSGIVING DAY—what does it mean? It means right thought and right action, and a whole day of it. It means a whole nation a whole day at a holy thing. Thanksgiving is man's return for blessings received.

The little path between the house and the stable had the honour of always inclining Mr. West to sing. Especially so this morning. He had so often given his song to the breeze along this trail that action had almost grown to habit. There was something wrong if the early relay of spirits did not hear the half-chanted lines :

“Oh, depths of mercy ; can it be  
That gate was left ajar for me?”

This was the one song, and he always gave it the same tune, as far as he knew. But we rather suspect that it was like the Lord's mercy—new every morning. Poetry he had, but not the sound that runs into music. Yet he often remembered Burns : “What a man dares, he can do,” and ventured out in solemn earnest. This morning his note was quite a strain higher than usual, and might have been called music—a long way off.

Janet in the house knew it was Thanksgiving Day too, and was humming her own song as she smoothed the cloth over the breakfast table. On hearing her

husband's high key, she threw in a few grace notes to help out his brave sallies. She had always been doing this, in more ways than one, and thus the home-music had been kept up to an average level.

"You are up in G this morning, Norman," was her salute as he entered the doorway. "Practising for the social, I expect? It was a roar that you promised. Well, just keep to this morning's pitch and the young people will not need a menagerie next summer."

"Very good, Janet. I'll do my best. I was thinking that I had surpassed myself, and am glad that you are of the same mind. A full barn makes a full heart, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth sings—or roars, if you like it that way. Socials add little to the substantials of life, but they sugar the tea, and minister to the sweet hunger of youth."


Shall we tell you of that evening's doings—the outs and ins, the music, tea, coffee, and the usual success? No! These things are but written on the wind. Mr. West was happy in the chair. He did not give his "roar" as a solo, but it was there, charging up and down among the singing like a wild buffalo in his glory.

At the close he stirred the curiosity of all by saying:

"Now, friends, I am going to give you a puzzle to take home with you. A missionary once lost his way on the prairie, and had to remain out all night. A blizzard was on, but his faith was sustained by the words, 'A man shall be as a shelter from the wind, and a covert from the tempest.' In the morning he hastily cut the letter B in the bark of a small poplar tree to which he had tied his pony. During the summer of that same

year a church was erected in the settlement, which, on completion, was found to be on the very spot where the missionary had spent the night. Now, young people, I want you to find that church, and give, if you can, the meaning of this rather peculiar circumstance."

A look of suspicious curiosity stole over the faces of the people. Each looked at the other, and wondered if their minister were playing tricks with them. But silence reigned, till Mr. Brown, who seemed to be suddenly inspired, rose and delivered himself after this fashion:



"Friends, we all know that our chairman is a modest man, and rarely speaks of himself, but in this parable he has, doubtless, departed from the ordinary. He may be very shrewd, but he is not going to send you into the night with a puzzle in your heads if I can help it. He is the missionary who was lost on the prairie, the little tree is in the back-yard there, and this is the church built over the spot where he slept. For aught I know, the very spot where he lay is right under the platform where he is standing this minute. How is that, Mr. Chairman?"

For once Mr. West was not of ready speech. He was caught, and could not hide it. Even his wife enjoyed the masterful colouring that came into his face. Forty years ago she alone had seen a look something like that, but this time a churchful of people saw it, and it sent them capering off all the way from bleak November to laughing May.

After a while, however, Mr. West found his tongue.

"Well, now, Mr. Brown, you have let the cat out of the bag with scant ceremony. I have been trying all



summer to find that spot, and succeeded only the other day. On tying my pony the discovery was made, and I thought the circumstance so unusual that I resolved, at the risk of alluding to myself, to divulge my secret as part of our thanksgiving programme. The guess about the platform must be very near the mark. When I cut the letter on the tree that morning I said to the pony: 'There, sir, B stands for Billy and Blizzard,' but now it stands for Bethel, the house of God. I know that I am taking broad thanksgiving liberties in thus speaking of myself, but confess that I feel somewhat at home in this confidence of boasting. 'Whereas many glory, I glory also; and ye suffer fools gladly, seeing that ye yourselves are wise.' The parable will all come out by-and-by."

Mr. Brown, being warmed up, was still ready to speak.

"Parable or no parable," said he, "it is no small privilege to worship in a building erected under the patronage of One who can bring a man through a North-West blizzard. The greater includes the less, and our faith will be strengthened by the discovery that the Lord is on our side. Your Building Committee cannot, I am afraid, lay much claim to conscious guidance in the matter. We have done better than we knew in locating the church where it is. To be sure, we all felt that this and no other place was the right one, but the reason for feeling so has not been given till to-night.

"As for the little tree," continued Mr. Brown, "that is mine. In choosing the site we saw the B, and the others jokingly said, 'B is for Brown.' It is yours Mr. Brown.' So then and there I adopted it. Now I have

this to say : If any more horses are tied to that tree the owners thereof shall be prosecuted according to law. You may plant as many other trees as you like, but as for this one, I am going to look after it as per contract."

Then arose another of the committee men—Mr. Perth, the one with the big head, full voice, and round genial face—and said :

"I stand witness that this tree was given to Mr. Brown. It is a ragged-looking specimen anyway, and all will wish him success in the training of his adopted charge.

"But," he continued, "I somehow feel inclined to say a word on the parable side of things. To my mind the meaning is clearly this : The night-outing on the prairie stands for the labours and trials of pioneer missionaries, the Man, as the covert from the tempest, for the secret of their zeal and perseverance, and the house of God standing on the spot, for the future Church of the West built on the foundation laid by these first men. Mr. West has not spoken for himself only but for all the brethren in like work. Augmentation, self support, and settled congregations are at hand, but only a few have had the privilege of doing foundation work. Our church may be the only building teaching clearly the trend of current events, but what it says is true of the whole West and of new beginnings everywhere. I know that a puzzle, like a nut, is prosy enough when the kernel is out, so will sit down in time. However, that is my solution of the parable. Take it for what it is worth."

"Good!" said one. "A Daniel!" cried another. "Amen!" joined in the rest, and soon they were all spinning over the prairie to their separate homes.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE GOLDEN WEDDING.

"YES, yes, keep at it? It is your old tune—a little more sting in it, I think. I've seen the day when your worst blow would have ruffled me less than the June mosquitoes, but you have me to-night, and you are mean enough to make the most of it. You will have another face to shave and another ear to blow your whistles on now, but you need not be learing me in at the door as if you had me at last."

It was the wind that Mr. West was talking to as he once more reached his own home—a biting, winter wind, ten years after the thanksgiving social. He had fight in him still, yet somehow he felt that the wind was young, he old, and that his only escape was retreat. Why so now, with him of the eagle eye and no back for the foe? That day had seen the end of his ministry. He had just returned from the induction of the young man called by the congregations that he had nursed up to self-support. This was as he would have it, and he most heartily welcomed his successor; but something within would not be controlled. The heart that had so long pulsed for God and a devoted people would not be still. It suddenly became limp and lean, and the

stupid winds swept doleful notes out of its loosened chords.

To him it was an after-funeral experience, and that night he sat for a long time with his elbows on his knees and his face in his hands, while memory carried him back and forth over his missionary life. We will not say but that he dropped a tear at his feet too. If so, it was an answered prayer, for he at once sat up straight as one resigned, and began to speak with liberty:

"Well, Janet, I have seen the end, and will try to be content. You will get me to keep now. I'll have this corner consecrated, I think, and will wait in patience till they carry my eerie bones to the place appointed. The Man shall be my hiding-place through the long night, and in the morning the storm will be over." With this he rose, as one who had been in the fight and had conquered.

"You will not be grudging your corner, Norman," remarked Janet, as she slipped over and stood beside him. "If the consecration is now on, I will need to be here." Then they joined hands, as they had done fifty years before, and only the Lord witnessed their golden wedding.

Here we leave our missionary and turn to gather up the fragments that remain. During these ten years Billy had been laid under the prairie sod with due honours; the church had been enclosed, groves planted, and the little poplar tree flourished in company with others that beautified the spot of that blizzard experience. Talbot Jones, who ran away, "lived to see another day," in which he paid one hundred dollars

of the remaining church debt. He did many other creditable things, which showed that the grace of God had reached him by another route than through the missionary's arms. Mr. Long, too, had found the knack of praying for himself (as he expressed it), and the young minister who followed Mr. West was none other than Mr. Ross, Long's partner of the shack. He had studied in Manitoba College, and come out "parson," as his companion had prophesied.

Here we drop the curtain over the visible Mr. West of those early days, but there are many yet alive on the plains of Saskatchewan who still feel the uplift of his spiritual presence.

### THE VANGUARD.

Give thanks O Earth for the lofty souls  
Who pointed to the deathless goals ;  
Who did the things that others pray  
And, passing, blazed for each the way.  
Thanksgiving for the dauntless few ;  
For those who scorned to be untrue ;  
Who built again our faith in man,  
And lit the ages as they ran.

Elect to be more than they seemed,  
Pledged soldiers of the mighty Dream.  
Sons born anew by altar flame  
Brows radiant with the mystic Name ;  
Who bore the God-fire in the breast,  
And asked not here the warrior's rest.  
These fought for us the wars of Him  
Who rules above the Seraphim.

## WEST OF THE WEST.

Made of unpurchasable stuff,  
They went the way when ways were rough.  
They, when the many had deceived,  
Held the long purpose and believed.  
They, when the face of God grew dim,  
Held through the dark and trusted Him.  
Brave souls who fought the mortal way,  
And knew that faith could not betray.

Sing of the tongues of fire that stirred  
Hearts with the wonder of a word ;  
But thanks for men who saw our need,  
And did bend destiny with deed.  
Souls of the high heroic birth,  
Men sent to poise this shaken earth ;  
And then, called back to God again,  
Left footprints here for other men.

